'After the Flood All the Colours Came Out'

The influence of the Hebrew Bible on U2: An exploration through a Jewish lens

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University.

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of the author's knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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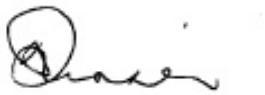

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ABSTRACT

Irish rock band U2 formed in Dublin more than 45 years ago and is still touring, recording and releasing music. The band has four members: lead singer Bono, guitarist The Edge, bass player Adam Clayton, and drummer Larry Mullen Jnr. To date U2 has released 16 albums (including a collaboration with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois released under the Passengers moniker, and one live album); several live DVDs, and the group has written more than 200 original songs. U2 has won more Grammy Awards than any other band in history, making them one of the most successful popular music groups of all time and a major, worthy subject for scholarly investigation.

The religious undercurrents in U2's secular songs, and U2's connection with Christianity have been examined by academics and the popular music press, however little has been published about how non-Christian fans connect with their biblical messages. Some scholars refer to U2's 'universalism'—their overt practice of speaking about faith and belief without tying their practice to any one religious denomination. In interviews with music and mainstream media, a YouTube series with Christian figure Eugene Peterson, and in his biography *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (2022) Bono repeatedly states that he finds inspiration in the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. The other Jewish influences on the music of U2 are more oblique, from Paul Celan whose poetry inspired the title of *The Unforgettable Fire* album, to Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan and Lou Reed.

In exploring the connection between U2 and the Hebrew Bible, my thesis draws on interpretations of the biblical text undertaken by Jewish scholars throughout the ages unveiling complex religious symbolism and layers in U2's music that have hitherto been unobserved. My thesis is the first in-depth exploration of the relationship between U2's music and the Hebrew Bible and provides a framework for future research.

I tested several approaches and methodologies to reveal the connection between U2 and the Hebrew Bible, within a textual and musical context, to then develop my own methodology. I found that by identifying common words and phrases that are contained in U2's lyrics and the Hebrew Bible and examining their literal and symbolic meanings and their gravitas in live performance, I could ascribe new meaning and a more nuanced

understanding to the way the songs are received. Bono's overt lyrical use of the Psalms continues the Jewish tradition of incorporating fragments of Psalms in songs used in communal prayers and Synagogue services. In addition, through this study I have found there are layers of intertextuality that create ambiguity, supporting the derivation of multiple meanings in interpretations of U2's work.

CONTENTS

List of Figures

PREFACE

I have been a U2 fan for more than 40 years, and as such there was a natural inclination to use an autoethnographic approach to frame my interpretation of the band´s work. As a teenager, I listened to the songs of longing and exaltation, the albums *Boy, October* and *War* etched into my subconscious so that I still know all the lyrics and the order of the songs 40 years later. In my youth I found U2's music moving and familiar. I remember the first time I saw the film clip for ´Gloria´ (*October)* on morning television. It was one of the most uplifting, spiritual songs I ever heard, even though I did not understand all the words, which I later learned were Latin. As a Jew, listening to U2's songs did not immediately suggest Christian symbolism or any association with Christianity, although I learnt that U2 were Christians and that many of their songs were inspired by the Bible.

As an adult, I discovered U2's deep connection to God and began to investigate how I, as a Jew, could experience their so-called Christian music in a spiritual way, without compromising my own religious beliefs. I switched off from reading the commentary and for many years only listened to the music, avoiding the interpretations of others.

Songs are an essential part of popular culture and religious experiences. I ´know´ U2 lyrics and Hebrew words and prayers from listening to and singing their songs, however, knowing the melody and words through the regular repetition of those songs does not necessarily give insight into the meaning of the lyrics. The meaning of lyrics is rarely understood unless the listener thinks deeply about them and engages with them in the context of the song. The tune, the arrangement and the melody are important, however what gives the words meaning is the way they are sung, the place (the location), who is participating (both as performer and audience members) and how they are heard.

My frame of reference is largely influenced by traditional Orthodox Judaism and Chabad Hasidism, whose outreach work in Australia has made them a dominant religious influence on many Australian Jews of my generation. Chabad rabbis lead major synagogues in Sydney and Melbourne, where the majority of Australian Jews reside, and serve the community through a myriad of religious institutions, including day school and religious governing bodies such as *betai din* (Jewish courts), which oversee conversions, marriage, divorce and

religious disputes. I am not a Torah scholar. I am a traditional Jew with many supportive Orthodox Jews in my inner circle. To them, I give thanks for sharing their knowledge at a level that I could understand and for allowing me to test my ideas about the Hebrew Bible.

I undertook the Florence Melton course at Shalom College, University of New South Wales, earning a Certificate in Jewish Studies. The program culminated in a guided tour of Israel with a local teacher as our guide. At each stop, we studied the biblical texts and discussed Rabbinic interpretations, adding depth and understanding to the modern application of the ancient Jewish religion. The first time I went to Jerusalem I was struck by how visible other religions were. From the campus of the Hebrew University, it is possible to look out over the entire city with its maze of crosses and minarets, but there are no obvious signs of Judaism. Jewish places appear to be invisible here, except for the remains of the ancient Hebrew Temple. I continued my study of Judaism, spending a term at the pluralistic Orthodox English language Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, in Jerusalem.

Since 2015 I have studied U2 and popular music, finding academic discourse that led me to think more deeply about both subjects, with the work of scholars such as Moylan validating my own theories about popular music. He writes, ´popular song speaks directly to the listener, at times perceived as to them alone,´ (Moylan, 2020, p. 14), and therefore that the interpretation of the listener—*my* interpretation as a listener—matters. How I hear and understand the music, sounds, lyrics, live performance and imagery associated with the band creates a meaning that may or may not align with that of others, including the performers and songwriters; nevertheless it is still valid.

In 2018 I contributed a chapter to Bloomsbury Academic's *U2 and the Religious Impulse, Take Me Higher,* ´You don't see me but you will: Jewish thought and U2´, edited by Scott Calhoun, a preeminent U2 scholar and academic who established the U2 Conference brand. Scott has written and edited several scholarly books about the band. This thesis is the extension of that project.

U2's long history of shining a light on injustice took a turn in the aftermath of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack on southern Israel and the murder of more than 300 people who were attending the SuperNova music event. Performing on October 10, 2023 at the Sphere in Las Vegas, Bono changed the lyric of ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´ to: ´Early

morning, October 7, the sun is rising in the desert sky. Stars of David, they took your life but they could not take your pride.´[1] This acknowledgement should be read as an expression of camaraderie and understanding with music fans, reminiscent of U2's comments after the Bataclan attack in France. However, in the polarised political environment of conflict between Israel and Palestine, U2 have been called "Zionist shills" on social media and accused of being silent about the horrors of the subsequent war in Gaza. This belies the band's long history of activism, their connection to Judaism and the Hebrew Bible, and makes this thesis even more relevant in understanding how their music can speak to people of all faiths and backgrounds.

[1] Kirsch, Noah (the *Daily Beast*): ´U2 lead singer Bono changed the lyrics to one of the band's songs – ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´– in a performance on Sunday in tribute to victims of the massacre at an Israeli music festival. ´Early morning, October 7, the sun is rising in the desert sky. Stars of David, they took your life but they could not take your pride,´ he sang. The original lyrics referenced a ´Memphis sky´ and referred to Martin Luther King Jr, but, ´in the light of what's happened in Israel and Gaza, a song about non-violence seems somewhat ridiculous, even laughable,´ Bono told the crowd. ´Our prayers have always been for peace and for non-violence.´ *Variety,* Copyright *The Newsweek/Daily Beast Company* LLC Oct 9, 2023

INTRODUCTION

´Music is the language of the spirit... I think all music is worship, actually. And if it's not God, if you don't believe in God, it can be anything. It can be a woman, it can be a lot of bad things, but it's always worship.´

—Bono, September 2016 interview with Charlie Rose on PBS (available on YouTube).

U2 formed in Dublin, Ireland in September 1976 and after more than 45 years the four original members: lead singer Bono (Paul Hewson); guitarist the Edge (Dave Evans); bass player Adam Clayton and drummer Larry Mullen Jnr, are still touring and releasing records together under the same moniker. To date, U2 has released 16 albums, one live album, several live DVDs and produced a collaborative album with Brian Eno released under the name 'Passengers'. U2 has written more than 200 original songs and won more Grammy Awards than any other band in history, making them one of the most successful popular music groups of all time and clearly a major subject for scholarly investigation. U2 is the only band to have won the Grammy Award for Album of the Year category twice, firstly for *The Joshua Tree* in 1987 and then *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* in 2005. Between them *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* and *All That You Can't Leave Behind* won 15 Grammy Awards. In 2010 NME grudgingly admitted U2 was the 'most influential band of the last 25 years' (Soghomonian, 2010, NME).

As U2's corpus encompasses more than five decades of original material, scholars such as Christopher Endrinal and others organise U2's albums into eras, each comprising three to four long play recordings. These eras signpost 'turns' in U2's style that are marked by changes in their production and recording, elements of their live performance and their use of semiotic language and visual representations. Therefore, approaching the corpus via the following eras allows for explorations of U2's work to be undertaken in chunks of three to five albums.

1 1980–1983: *Boy* (1980), *October* (1981), *War* (1983), *Under a Blood Red Sky* (1983), referred to by Endrinal as ´the first period´ (Endrinal 2008, p. 5)
2 1984–1990: *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984), *The Joshua Tree* (1987), *Rattle and Hum* (1988), ´the second period´ (Endrinal, 2008, p. 7)

3 1991–1999: *Achtung Baby* (1991), *Zooropa* (1993), *Passengers* (1995), *Pop* (1997), ′the third period′ (Endrinal, 2008, p. 9)

4 2000–2009: *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000), *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004) *No Line on the Horizon* (2009), ′the fourth period′ (Endrinal, 2008, p. 11)

As of September 2023, a fifth era can be identified:

5. *Songs of Innocence* (2014), *Songs of Experience* (2017), *Songs of Surrender* (2022).[2]

Throughout the five identifiable eras there have been religious undercurrents in U2's secular songs. U2's connection with Christianity has been studied by academics and the popular music press throughout the band's long career, however little has been published about how non-Christian fans connect with their biblical messages. Some scholars, such as Mark Peters have referred to U2's 'religious humanism' (Peters, 2019, p. 188) as a public practice of speaking about faith and belief without deliberately tying their expression to one denomination. In interviews with music and mainstream media, and in a YouTube series with Christian figure Eugene Peterson, as well as in his biography *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (2022), Bono has repeatedly stated that he looks to the Psalms of the Old Testament for inspiration. The other Jewish influences on the music of U2 are more oblique, from Paul Celan whose poetry inspired the title of *The Unforgettable Fire* album, to Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Lou Reed, producer Howie B and Allan Ginsberg—artists who all grew up in Jewish homes and were exposed to liturgical tunes and the text of the Hebrew Bible in their childhood.

The Hebrew Bible is Judaism's foundational text. It is known by the acronym, ′Tanakh′, an abbreviation of the names of its three parts: *Torah* (The Five Books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and *Ketuvim* (Writings). Note that for the rest of this thesis, the terms 'the Hebrew Bible' or 'biblical' refer to the Tanakh. Establishing the relevance of the Tanakh to the study of U2 cannot be done without addressing some key issues: firstly, the ubiquitousness of antisemitism in musicology and musicians from Wagner to Ye (formerly known as Kanye West); and secondly, the obscuring of Jewish thought and interpretation in favour of a Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible. Philip Ewell devotes a chapter to

[2] Although *Songs of Surrender* is included in the list of eras above, it is omitted from this study because of the proximity of the release date to the finalisation of this thesis.

antisemitism in his monograph *On Music Theory and Making Music More Welcoming for Everyone* (2023), noting, ´Christian theology runs deeply through much of what we do in the academic study of music, and this hidden Christianity requirement can easily fall under the rubric of antisemitism as well´ (Ewell, 2023, p. 254). While Ewell is referring to the study of classical music, popular music analysis is approached similarly, and so I suggest there is much to be done in acknowledging and studying the Jewish influence on popular music, in this case revealing the extent to which the Hebrew Bible features in U2's repertoire.

To be clear, there is no suggestion that collectively or individually the members of U2 have expressed any antisemitic views, nor have the scholars who study them. However, antisemitism is deeply embedded in European history, including in music, as Ruth HaCohen explores in *The Music Libel Against the Jews* (2012). Jewish aspects of popular music are often ignored and erased; Jewish influences are concealed, the origin story either deliberately obscured, accidentally overlooked, or entirely removed. In U2's case, their Jewish connections are rarely foregrounded by scholars, and are presented through a Christian frame, for example in scholarly analysis of the use of Psalm 40 for the song ´40´ from the *War* (1983) album.

By exploring the connection between U2 and the Hebrew Bible, this project aims to foreground Jewish thought to provide a transformative interpretation of the lyrics. I do not intend to critique all the known Christian studies of U2's work; rather I am adding to the canon. This thesis draws on interpretations of the biblical text undertaken by Jewish scholars throughout the ages, unveiling complex religious symbolism and layers in U2's music that have hitherto been overlooked. The project interprets the music of U2, primarily focusing on the lyrics and applying critical listening techniques to determine if there are identifiable ethnomusicological influences that have a connection to the time of the Hebrew Bible and even to the ancient Jewish Temple.

For this thesis the primary concern is interpreting lyrics rather than the production and music, because words have identifiable resonance with the Hebrew Bible and provide a strong evidence base to support a Jewish interpretation of the band's work. This approach has limitations, particularly in developing a deeper, more nuanced musicological study, and as such there is scope for future study examining connections with sustained musical/production analysis such as melodic, rhythmic, or modal reference to Jewish liturgical practices.

Research Aims and Objectives

This thesis aims to examine the influence of the Hebrew Bible on U2's musical oeuvre through three primary objectives:

1. To identify and analyse direct and indirect biblical references and intertextuality in U2's work, with particular attention to the band's use of Hebrew Biblical texts.
2. To investigate these Biblical influences through the lens of Jewish Biblical interpretation and exegesis, thereby offering an alternative to the predominant Christian analytical framework in existing U2 scholarship.
3. To explore how U2's use of Hebrew Biblical elements might explain the band's broad spiritual appeal, particularly among listeners who do not identify as Christian.

The research addresses two key questions:

1. How does applying Jewish Biblical interpretation to U2's work reveal new meanings or understandings of their music?
2. To what extent do U2's musical elements reveal connections to Jewish musical traditions and Hebrew Biblical sources that enrich our understanding of their work?

This thesis is structured as follows:

The literature review examines how scholars have predominantly focused on U2's work through Christian theological frameworks while overlooking Jewish influences. I also explore literature on the ancient Temple musical practices, their documentation, and their transmission through generations into Western sacred and secular music and investigate the complex intersections between contemporary music and religious traditions. I highlight the tendency to segment scholarship by denomination while neglecting the Jewish roots of Biblical references. The literature review establishes the foundation for examining how U2's music connects to Jewish thought and practice, addressing a gap in the scholarship by moving beyond the Christian-centric analyses that have dominated academic discussions of the band, and providing a more nuanced understanding of how ancient religious traditions continue to shape contemporary popular music.

Scope is a significant issue for this study, as distinctions between Christianity and Judaism and where these two religions intersect in modernity are complex and require deep

theological and sociological analysis that do not fit within the parameters of this research. Rather than attempting to cover such broad ground, this thesis focuses on making a direct connection between the songs of U2 and Jewish thought as expressed in the Hebrew text and written about by Jewish scholars. Along with the complexity of examining the Biblical elements of U2's canon and the religious frame, parameters for studying popular music are also complex and contested and can be cross-disciplinary. The textual constituents of popular songs are multifaceted and include sound, lyrics, production, live performance, vocal persona, and studio and live recordings; and it is also common within popular music scholarship to refer to previously published interviews with songwriters and band members. In U2's case this means there are thousands of articles across a broad range of media, from daily newspapers to Christian podcasts and everything in between. The volume of this material causes it to be beyond the scope of this study, therefore it was necessary to make decisions about what sources to cite. I have been selective and chosen to only reference pieces that are relevant to the subject of U2 and the Hebrew Bible. While there is little in the public sphere about U2 and Judaism, there are several special interest publications focused on U2 and Christianity, courses and programs linking U2 and Christian theology, and websites devoted to the biblical references in the lyrics.

In popular music scholarship it is generally accepted that the 'song' is the text, and as there are often many versions of songs, and it is possible for different interpretations to be applied to particular performances or recordings of the same work. The live performance of songs can, and in U2's case often does, lead to additional meanings being inserted into the text. This occurs through lyrical changes, gestures, and other elements such as staging, lighting, and the presence of additional performers on stage. As Allan Moore writes in *Song Means* (Moore, 2012, p. 3) ´popular songs are, frequently, put together with a minimum of overt concern for aesthetics (although aesthetics are still there), and always with an ear to a particular listening public.´ Meaning can be created and interrogated in a myriad of ways, including by using words as data and identifying trends and symbols. Whereas traditional musicology and musical analyses rely on the ´heard´ aspects of the song, in interpreting popular song it is essential to consider the context, including who wrote the song, what they wrote it about (subconsciously or un-subconsciously), how effective it is in conveying any intended or unintended message or meaning, and how it is heard, where and by whom.

Moberg and Partridge in the introduction to *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music*

and Religion (2017) note ‘text-based’ approaches are commonly used in studies of religion and popular music, finding that when studying the text, ´scholars of popular music focus just as much, if not more so, on the music itself, on the sonic environment as they do the lyrics´ (Moberg and Partridge, 2017, p. 4). Western classical music analysis argues that specific combinations of chords, melodies or notes can elicit certain emotions, however this type of analysis rarely takes into account the experience of the audience, the anticipation a certain lyric or coda can evoke, or the different responses of hardcore fans and casual listeners. Nor does it account for the interaction between the performer and the audience, and the persona of the singer, projected or otherwise. For example, a version of ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ (*The Joshua Tree*, 1987) might use the same notes, melody and words, but is unlikely to have the same emotional impact for someone hearing it on the radio for the first time in 2025, as it does for someone who has followed the band for 40 years and is experiencing the song performed live by U2, complete with the staging, sound, video and lighting effects, along with the reaction of fellow audience members.

In Chapter 2, the methodology for this thesis is explained, with a discussion on different approaches to analysing popular music, and the validity of focusing on lyrics and the perspective of the listener. This approach combines textual analysis methods derived from Jewish interpretive traditions with critical listening techniques from musicology to examine both the explicit and implicit ways U2 engages with Hebrew Biblical sources. I use three analytical approaches, each contributing a layer of interpretation to unveil both explicit and implied intertextual references to the Bible within U2's extensive body of work. By scrutinising each U2 album and highlighting Jewish textual allusions in the five eras of the band’s career, a more nuanced understanding of their use of Biblical quotations has emerged. Additionally, I identified significant song words (or ‘keywords’) by gauging their frequency and context in U2's songs to discern intended meanings and explore esoteric or mystical connections from a Jewish point of view. I did this by compiling a Word document containing the lyrics of approximately 200 original U2 songs which provided a pool of quantitative data. I then performed keyword searches of the document to identify individual words and phrases to determine how many times they occurred in the lyrics written by U2, finding a number of words and phrases used by Bono in his songwriting that relate to the Hebrew Bible.

I cross-referenced lyrics with versions of the Hebrew Bible on sefaria.org, using the

Koren Jerusalem Bible, Sefaria Community Translation and the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) versions, the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Artscroll Tanach Series* and other Jewish philosophers to determine the significance of these words and further support the case that the interplay of words and phrases infers a connection between U2 and Jewish Biblical symbols, text and thought.

The autobiographical *U2 by U2* (2006) and Bono's 2022 memoir *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story* (2022) provide some material that I have used to test my arguments. For example, in his memoir, Bono explicitly refers to instances where he has incorporated biblical text into U2's lyrics, and often explains why he has done so. While acknowledging the writer's intent, I have undertaken a deeper exploration to find additional meaning of such lyrics and add a more nuanced interpretation by identifying their significance and usage in the original Hebrew text.

My approach aligns with reader-response theory, reference to Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model which validates interpretations beyond authorial intent. The Hebrew Bible's foundational role in Western culture means its imagery becomes embedded in the cultural unconscious, as demonstrated when Bono notes that Psalm 40 ´just came to mind´ during creation of ´40´. My interpretations do not claim superior authority but offer an additional lens that illuminates previously unrecognised dimensions of U2's spiritual engagement - one systematically overlooked in existing scholarship. The value lies not in establishing definitive meanings but in demonstrating how Jewish interpretive traditions can reveal new understanding of the band's work.

One of the words I examined was ´soul´, a concept that has its origin in Judaism where the first mention of ´soul´ is found in the Hebrew Bible in Genesis 2:7 (Sefaria Community Translation): ´God formed the man of dust from the ground and he blew into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living being´. In his sermon, ´The Three Stages of Creation´ Rabbi Sacks notes that the proof that God gave humans a soul is that we can speak. Sacks says, ´Because we can speak, we can think and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists´. U2 uses the word ´soul´ in 26 songs, including ´Crumbs from Your Table´, ´Original of the Species´ and ´Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own´ from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004), and ´Moment of Surrender´ and ´Breathe´ from *No Line On The Horizon* (2009). All of these songs are intensely personal; it could be said

they give us insight into the soul of the lyricist. The word ´soul´ first appears in U2's lyrics on ´Wire´ the third track on the band's fourth album, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984). Produced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, ´Wire´ is an example of the importance of considering sound production and the *way* words are sung to construct meaning. Layers of manipulated guitar sounds are built up before the drums, and then vocals are introduced, giving the song its texture and intensity.

Chapter 3 provides a chronological examination of U2's discography, tracing the evolution of Hebrew Biblical references throughout their career and offering interpretations through a Jewish lens. The analysis reveals how songs like ´Rejoice´ from their 1981 album *October,* typically interpreted through Christian frameworks, actually embody the Jewish concept of Tikkun Olam—the spiritual practice of repairing the world through personal transformation. This connection is evidenced in Bono's lyric, ´I can't change the world but I can change the world in me if I rejoice,´ a sentiment he later inverts in ´Lucifer's Hands´ (2014), demonstrating the band's evolving spiritual perspective.

The chapter also explores how U2's use of Biblical narratives extends beyond isolated references to form recurring motifs throughout their work. For instance, the theme of exile and compassion for ´the stranger´ in ´Stranger in a Strange Land´ (*October*) connects directly to Exodus 20:22, while their enduring live staple, ´40´ (*War*, 1983) appropriates Psalm 40 in a way that transcends Christian interpretation, despite being widely received that way. As John Waters documents in *Race of Angels,* (1994) this created tension for the band, who resisted being labelled as ´Christian soldiers´ while continuing to incorporate Biblical imagery in their compositions. The analysis extends to later works such as ´Beautiful Day´ (2000), which not only references the Noah narrative but employs musical structures reminiscent of Jewish liturgical practices. The song's congregational qualities mirror elements of Shabbat services, while lyrics like, ´Take me to that other place, teach me´ align with fundamental Jewish approaches to spirituality centred on learning and textual engagement—a stark contrast to object-oriented worship in earlier religious traditions. Through these examples, the chapter demonstrates how a Jewish interpretive framework can reveal previously unexamined dimensions of U2's musical and spiritual expression.

The purpose of Chapter 4 is to examine Judaism's relevance to the U2 canon, primarily by locating the significant presence of the Hebrew Bible in lyrics. Study of the Torah, the

first portion of the Hebrew Bible, is the unifying expression of Jewish faith. All Jews are obligated to learn Torah, and in some ultra-Orthodox communities, men study Torah as their full-time occupation. For Jews, the Tanakh is the proof text, believed by Orthodox Jews to have been handed to Moses directly from God, and as such it underpins the entire premise of Judaism. The Bible tells the story of human experience under the watchful eye and hand of God, from the Creation to the sibling rivalries of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, the escape of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt led by Moses, their exile in the desert and worshipping at the sacred temple in Jerusalem; it lays out the moral code by which humans should conduct their lives.

The Hebrew Bible is the only written religious code that dates back more than 3,000 years. Inevitably the way the Hebrew Bible is interpreted and used has transformed considerably over that time, with the most significant split in practice occurring with the evolution of Christianity.

According to the Jewish Rabbinical tradition, there are four ways of reading and interpreting the Tanakh in the Jewish tradition:

1. the plain (simple) or literal reading (known in Hebrew as ‘Peshat’);
2. the allegorical reading through the text's hints or allusions (‘Remez’);
3. the deeper meaning of the text/homiletic analysis (‘Midrash’ often abbreviated to ‘drash’)
4. secret or mystical insight (‘Sod’)

Hence the acrostic, ‘PaRDeS’ which translates to ´orchard´ in Hebrew, metaphorically representing the rich layers of meaning to be found in sacred texts.

The application of Jewish interpretive frameworks to analyse works created within Christian contexts has precedents in various humanities disciplines. A notable example is *Reading the Underthought: Jewish Hermeneutics and the Christian Poetry of Hopkins and Eliot* (2010) by Kinereth Meyer and Rachel Salmon Deshen. As professors in the Department of English at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, they have developed methodological approaches for examining Christian poetry through Jewish hermeneutical lenses, particularly in their analysis of Gerard Manly Hopkins and T.S. Eliot. My approach to U2's music follows a similar trajectory, drawing primarily on Rabbinic interpretive traditions, rather than Christian theological frameworks. This methodological choice does not suggest that Jewish readings

should replace or supersede Christian interpretations—indeed, my intention is not to establish a hierarchy of interpretive validity, but rather to enrich the existing analytical conversation surrounding U2's work. Meyer and Deshen articulate this complementary approach when they write: ´No one-to-one relationship exists between our interpretive practice and that of the Rabbis, just as there is no standardisation (or sometimes even family relationship) between one rabbinic interpreter and another. Nevertheless... thinking about texts in this Jewish sort of way has implications for the way we can bring home to ourselves the texts of another tradition´ (Meyer & Deshen, 2010, p. 75). This recognition of interpretive plurality informs my examination of U2's music, opening new avenues for understanding their engagement with biblical texts.

For this section I started with a list of 12 songs that I wanted to explore, setting out to find examples of melodies from U2 songs that could be meaningfully compared with musicological analysis of Ashkenazi Jewish tunes. However, this approach did not yield meaningful data, so I refocused my methodology, delving into a series of case studies that exemplify the influence of the Hebrew Bible on U2's musical repertoire. The resultant chapter examines five songs in detail: ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´,´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´, ´Love Rescue Me´, ´Moment of Surrender´, and ´13 (There is a Light)´. Through close analysis of lyrics, musical composition, and performance elements, the chapter demonstrates how U2 incorporates biblical themes, language, and imagery into their work. This examination reveals a nuanced engagement with Jewish textual traditions that goes beyond simple allusion, suggesting a deeper, more complex relationship between the band's artistic output and ancient Hebrew sources.

The analysis in this chapter takes a multifaceted approach, considering not only the explicit textual references but also the more subtle musical and performative aspects that evoke biblical resonances. By exploring the songs' evolution through different live performances and contexts, the chapter illustrates how U2's interpretation and presentation of these biblical influences have developed over time. This dynamic interaction between ancient text and contemporary music underscores the enduring relevance of the Hebrew Bible in modern cultural expression and highlights U2's role in reinterpreting these traditions for a global audience. The chapter's findings contribute to a broader understanding of the intersection between popular music and religious texts, challenging simplistic notions of secularisation in contemporary culture.

Chapter 6 focuses on the spiritual and biblical aspects of U2's live performance. U2 have been touring for almost 50 years, playing thousands of shows, so investigating elements of their live shows proved to be a substantial endeavour, worthy of a separate chapter. Again, I determined that focusing on individual songs allowed for a more detailed exploration of nuanced connections that emerged over time to demonstrate how the Hebrew Bible has been referenced in U2's live performances. There is a sense of ritual established through songs being sung in a particular order, the main players leading and the congregation following, with members of the community at times adding their own local flavour by using chants, or in the case of a U2 show, props such as signs and balloons. Significantly, without an audience the performance does not exist; similarly, in Jewish ritual performance, the service cannot exist without at least 10 participants.

This chapter also examines how U2's beliefs and politics are presented in constantly changing venues and with different audiences. U2's last show before the COVID-19 pandemic was in Mumbai, heralding their first time playing that continent. The next live performance by band members the Edge and Bono was in May 2022 in a train station that was being used as a bomb shelter in Kyiv, Ukraine, during the war with Russia. These bookended activities are consistent with U2's business plan and the individual activism of the band members, and provide a case study for how U2 have stayed relevant on the global stage for more than 40 years.

There are aspects of live performance that give U2's songs an identity that is not necessarily possible with a studio version—as such many of the Biblical references in U2's work are only visible and audible in their live performances. For example, as Allan Moore notes in *The Pop Palimpset* (2018, pg. 88) Bono uses 'Hallelujah' in various forms to elevate the moment and as a signal, but this is a device he employs only twice in published song lyrics, on ´Hallelujah Here She Comes´ and ´Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses´. Analysis of live performances allows for a more nuanced understanding of the meaning of U2's songs, as Bono says, ´You discover the songs in a way. You write them during the recording and you don't yourself know what's really going on in them until you take them on the road.´ (Hooper, 1997, 34.10).

Deane Galbraith argues that U2's use of biblical allusions effectively creates two groups

of listeners: ´a knowledgeable Christian in-group and an unknowledgeable non-Christian out-group´ (Galbraith, 2011, p. 181), who are perhaps ´irreconcilable´. This type of categorisation can have the effect of excluding non-Christian knowledge holders, such as Jews, and does not fully explain the significance of U2's songs that have elements of Jewish Biblical text and thought. This exclusionary categorisation in interpretative approaches to U2's music mirrors a broader issue in Western music historiography, where certain influences have been systematically overlooked or undervalued. Just as Galbraith's analysis does not fully account for the Jewish biblical knowledge that informs U2's work, traditional music histories have often neglected the profound influence of Jewish musical traditions on Western music. This pattern of exclusion extends beyond popular music analysis into the foundations of our understanding of Western musical development.

As ethnomusicologist Edwin Seroussi argues, ´Jewish music´ has often been treated as the ´Jew´ of Jewish studies—marginalised and viewed as less significant than other cultural elements (Seroussi, 2017). Similarly, the rich traditions of cantillation and liturgical music stemming from the Hebrew Bible have not been given due recognition in the narrative of Western music's evolution. This oversight is particularly striking given that, as Judah M. Cohen (2014) observes, the Torah service remains a central feature of worship even in non-traditional Jewish institutions, maintaining direct connections with almost two millennia of Jewish practice. Broadening perspectives to include these overlooked influences allows the development of a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the diverse roots of Western music, both in its popular and classical forms.

Lastly, Philip Ewell says of White Mythologies in *On Music Theory,* ´music histories have pinned the beginning of our musical Western Canon to two entities, namely, the Christian church and ancient Greece. I hardly need to point out that this Canon therefore is a child of Western civilization, not its parent´ (Ewell, 2023, p. 87). The Hebrew Bible predates both entities, and its influence on Western musical traditions has been underappreciated in conventional music histories, creating a gap in our understanding of how ancient Jewish textual traditions continue to shape contemporary popular music expression.

The chapters of this thesis examine how Jewish interpretive frameworks might offer alternative readings of U2's engagement with biblical themes, adding another perspective to the existing scholarly discourse.

CHAPTER 1: Literature Review

The influence of the Hebrew Bible on U2's artistic evolution remains relatively underexplored in academic literature. This thesis seeks to illuminate Judaism's impact on the band, arguing this influence has its roots in the rituals that originated in the era of the Hebrew Temple. The musical practices of the Temple Era are documented in the Torah and other Jewish sources, which describe the roles of musicians, and the instruments employed in ritual religious observances of that period. This research constructs a narrative that establishes a connection between U2 and the practices of the ancient Jewish Temple (c.1000 BCE), primarily through the band's incorporation of Hebrew Bible text in their lyrics and live performances.

While existing scholarship has primarily focused on U2's Christian influences, this thesis seeks to broaden the scope of analysis aiming to fill a gap in the current understanding of U2's spiritual and musical roots. Notably, there is room for research investigating how the musical traditions and spirituality of the ancient Hebrew Bible have shaped mainstream popular music, whether through lyrical content, compositional techniques, vocal and instrumental arrangements, or the incorporation of liturgical responses. This thesis addresses this gap by focusing on how the presence of the Hebrew Bible in U2's musical compositions and performances establishes a connection between contemporary popular music, the modern fan experience, and ancient Temple worship practices.

1. U2 and Biblical Influences: Current Scholarship

A substantial body of literature examining U2 focuses on exploring the band's connection to Christianity, predominantly by correlating the use of Biblical allusions in their lyrics with the Christian self-identification of lead singer, Bono, who frequently incorporates themes of faith, God, and Jesus in his songwriting. William Goodman (2012, p.111) argues that the presence of Psalms and 'other biblical voices' in U2's work is ´undisputed,´ noting that the extent to which these voices are discernible is often a subject of debate, particularly among fans. This discourse, regarding the degree of U2's Biblical references, has been ongoing throughout the band's career, reaching a notable peak with the release of *The Joshua*

Tree (1987), when U2's significant Evangelical Protestant fan base in the United States began to scrutinize the band's commitment to Christian values (Scharen, 2006, p.108).

Bono has been notably forthcoming about his sources of inspiration and the influence of the Bible and other literary works on his art. Approximately two decades ago, Bono authored an introduction for *The Book of Psalms*, (Bono, 1999) published by the Christian publishing house, Canongate Books. In 2016 he participated in an interview discussing the Psalms with Eugene Peterson, creator of *The Message*, a contemporary paraphrase of the Bible of which there are 17 million copies in print (Bono & Eugene Peterson, YouTube, 2016) The band's engagement with this text extended beyond that interview, as evidenced by their use of pages from *The Message* as confetti during their 2015 'iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE' tour.

This study set out to explore the ways in which the Hebrew Bible has influenced U2's music and its view of society by linking it to the original Temple practices, some 500 years before the Christian Era. In 1976, French composer and musicologist Suzanne Haïk-Vantoura published 'La musique de la Bible', in which she somewhat controversially argued that the undeciphered marks in the Hebrew scriptures were cantillation marks dating back to the time when the Hebrew Temple stood in Jerusalem. Haïk-Vantoura developed a code key for these marks to allow the composition of music for the Psalms, purportedly recreating the sounds and melodies as they were originally performed. Haïk-Vantoura's methodology allows the sounds of the Hebrew Bible to be heard and provides the opportunity to trace their passage through church and synagogue to discover the relation between Psalms superscriptions and music (Mitchell, 2012, pp. 376–377).

One of the initial questions posed for this study is whether it is possible to extend Haïk-Vantoura's approach to show how the musical influence of the Psalms and other Hebrew sources have survived to be recognisable in the modern music canon, and have therefore come to influence U2.

2. U2's Musical Development and Influences

U2's musical references are broad and the influence of their peers and collaborators can be heard clearly in the different eras of U2's catalogue. In the first authorised autobiography, *U2*

*by U2 (*2006) the band members give some insight into how and why their music and lyrics have developed a certain way, citing the influence of their participation in prayer groups and from working with various producers. *U2 by U2* has been used as a primary source by many researchers looking for the band's viewpoint of its own history and musical approach; however it has its limitations. Marketed as an autobiography, but co-written by Neil McCormick, a journalist and longtime personal friend of the band, *U2 by U2* is a sympathetically constructed, 'carefully mediated' (Calhoun, 2015, p. ix), collection of transcripts of interviews with the four band members and their long-standing manager, Paul McGuiness. There are significant areas of research that are not fully explored in *U2 by U2*, such as the band's relationship with Leonard Cohen, and the book only covers the period to the release of *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004) which makes it a useful but somewhat limited text for this thesis.

As Frith and Goodwin argue the ´textual study of the music itself (as opposed to its lyrics, iconography, or consumption) remains quite underdeveloped´ (Frith and Goodwin, 2006, p. 275), and that the study of 'pop music' is dominated by enthusiasts. This is still true of U2, with most researchers in the field being self-proclaimed fans of the band who also write from the perspective of their own individual subject matter area, such as philosophy or theology. One such example is Greg Garrett's 2009 publication, *We Get To Carry Each Other: The Gospel According to U2*. Garrett, a US-based Professor of English and theologian, has written several books on Christianity and Theology referencing at times the intersection between faith and culture. Garret notes that he focuses on U2's reference to Psalms because Bono has said it is his ´favourite book´, commenting, ´these ancient prayers were part of (Bono's) first real experience of God´ (Garrett, 2009, p. 26). Inevitably, Garrett's explanation of the use of Psalms in Bono's lyrics, and the psalm-like qualities of many U2 songs, is from a viewpoint of Christian faith. He proposes, for example, that ´Yahweh´ from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* is, 'another sung prayer we could think of as a contemporary psalm, one actually directed to God by name' (Garrett, 2009, p. 26), but what eludes Garrett and other Christian authors is ethnographic reference to the genesis of the Psalms. In this instance, there are qualities of the song that are not psalm-like from a Jewish perspective, including the use of the term, ´Yahweh´ which signals it as a Christian interpretation of a Hebraic idea. Essentially this reading ignores the Jewish roots of The Book of Psalms, preferring to situate the U2 canon as influenced by Christian belief.

3. Interpretation and Analysis of U2's Work

Interpretations of U2's work do not end with simply finding the textual references to the Bible in the lyrics and using this as evidence of the band's religiosity, because the Bible is also quoted extensively in explicitly secular artistic works as it is the most commonly read book throughout the world. As Allan Moore demonstrates in *Song Means*, there are many approaches to analysing popular music (Moore, 2012). The meaning ascribed to U2's songs by the non-religious listener, who does not hear the references as Biblical, can be as valid as the understanding of those who claim they are Christian. In *U2 and the Religious Impulse: Take Me Higher* (2018), edited by Scott Calhoun, scholars seek to look beyond the lyrics to present broader perspectives on the intersection between U2 and religion.

U2 and the Religious Impulse: Take Me Higher was the first academic publication to feature a chapter on U2 and Judaism (Dinnen, 2018, pp. 147–158), a subject that had not previously been covered despite the close attention paid to the band's use of Biblical themes and motifs by scholars. Prior to editing *U2 and the Religious Impulse* Scott Calhoun wrote and edited several works on U2, including *U2 Above, Across and Beyond: Interdisciplinary Assessments* (2015) and, as noted earlier in this thesis, convenes and runs the U2 Conference and founded the U2 Studies Network which has a curated online presence. Calhoun and others who present academic research on U2 commonly refer to their own ´feelings´ about the lyrics and the music—their personal interpretations—and will often reference the reflections made by band members in interviews with popular music press journalists. Calhoun, Garrett and others see Bono's love of the Psalms as an expression of his belief in Christ.

It is clear that much of the literature about U2 is written from a Christian perspective. In 2019, Nicholas P. Greco, Associate Professor of Communications and Media, published *The Rosary and the Microphone* focusing on U2 and Christianity. Like Michael J Gilmour, a Professor of New Testament and English Literature, Greco is based at a leading Canadian Christian university and is a self-proclaimed U2 fan-scholar who claims his book is a 'love letter to U2' and to French literary theorist and philosopher Roland Barthes (Greco, 2019, p. xiii). Greco says that U2's 'mediated brand' is driven by 'the religious impulse', both explicitly and implicitly (Greco, 2019, p. 2). His references to Bono's 'religious sensibility'

and the band's relationship with religion is framed entirely from a Christian perspective. As evidence of U2's devotion to Christianity, Greco uses a quote attributed to Jesus in the New Testament to support the Christian source of the band's 'guiding principles' (Greco, 2019, p. 11), Matthew 22:37-40: 'He said to him, "You shall love the Lord Your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind'. This is the greatest and first commandment…'. The source of this text is Deuteronomy, demonstrating that if examined more closely, a link can be made between U2's music and the Jewish root of Christian thought and popular music in general.

The need of scholars based at Christian universities, such as Greco and Gilmour, to write about popular music is a reflection of their devotion to the music, and what Hager asserts is 'part of the sacralisation process, bringing attention to the connections of popular music to religion'. Hager's collection *Religion and Popular Music: Artists, Fans and Cultures,* covers the religious and cultural aspects of popular music and genres such as heavy metal, pop and rock, reggae, folk and ambient through the 'prism of the artist' (Hager, 2018, pg. 2). Hager notes, 'At times, this form of research has veered close to Christian apologetics, attempting to interpret every form of popular music as proclaiming a Christian message'. Hager says his collection makes a 'conscious effort to avoid this form of scholarship' (Hager, 2018, pp. 5–6). However, at this point in time, authors who interpret U2 from a Christian theological perspective have been largely unchallenged.

In the Foreword to *U2 and the Religious Impulse*, W. David O. Taylor who describes himself as an 'arts pastor' and is Assistant Professor of Theology and Culture at Fuller Theological Seminary, argues that Bono is a 'religious hybrid' (Taylor, 2018, pg. xii), because of his dual Catholic and Protestant family background, and reflects on how this influences his worldview and the expression of his faith. Contributors to *U2 and the Religious Impulse* seek to unpack this hybridity and also give some insight into religious and secular fan experiences of U2; however, researchers repeatedly return to a limited variety of original source material. For example, Marstal refers to Calhoun's description of The Edge's guitar sound portraying the 'bell-like' quality as being a musical signifier of the band's Christian and spiritual core (Marstal, 2018, p.12).

Meynell attributes Christian sentiment to U2's lyrics, even those lyrics that are said by the author to be ´stream of consciousness´ (Meynell, 2018, pp. 89-97). He claims the

songs ´40´ (*War*, 1983), ´Yahweh´ (*How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, 2004) and ´Moment of Surrender´ (*No Line On the Horizon*, 2009) as examples of U2 conveying typical Christian theological expressions of shame and joy, uplifting fans while leaving them 'yearning' for more, and situating the spiritual reactions of fans within a psychological context. When Meynell describes shame and joy as biblical concepts he frames them solely within Christian theological discourse even though he recognizes ´40´ and Bono's use of the ancient Jewish prayer known as the Aaronic Blessing (Numbers 6:22–27) as being 'inspired by the Old Testament', rather than situating it as a common Jewish prayer.

Similarly, *U2 and Philosophy: How to Decipher an Atomic Band*, (2006) edited by Mark Wrathall, is a collection of essays written by a selection of academics and teachers of philosophy who are largely employed at colleges in the United States. The editor states that he hopes that the book will enhance appreciation of U2's music, 'by showing the coherence and depth of thought behind it…(and) as an invitation to further critical thought and reflection about the serious issues that concern the group' (Wrathall, 2006, p. xi). The collection focuses on 'notions of love' in U2's music and 'finding meaning' referencing the 'existentialist Christian tradition of Kierkegaard, Pascal and Dostoevsky—a tradition which insists that religious ideas have a worldly significance'. While interested in the politics and ethics of U2, its members, and its fans, *U2 and Philosophy* lacks a musicological viewpoint, with Wrathall claiming, ´U2 is known almost as much for their religiosity and political activism as for their music. U2's music has always been suffused with Christian themes and thick with scriptural references´ (Wrathall, 2006, p. ix).

The compilation of articles in *U2 and Philosophy: How to Decipher an Atomic Band* focuses on where these spiritual references are situated from the fan/author perspective within the framework of philosophical thought attributing meaning and messaging to specific lyrics. This is seen by contrasting Kerry Soper's analysis of the 1992 Zoo TV tour (Soper, 2006, p. 69) with Susan Fast's essay, ´Music, Contexts and Meaning in U2´ (2000) demonstrating that there is a gap between philosophical and musicological approaches. Whereas Soper is interested in applying 20th Century philosopher Heidegger's view of faith and God, and discussing the larger-than-life personality cultivated by lead singer, Bono, to reveal U2's worldview, Fast is focused on foregrounding the music and analysing how popular music can function as discourse by bringing the music, images and lyrics together. Fast provides an excellent framework for unpacking U2's songs, analysing ´Sunday Bloody

Sunday′ (*War*, 1984) and ′Zoo Station′ (*Achtung Baby*, 1991), not by addressing the band's image and music but by the style and substance of the music itself and the situation of its performance. As Fast notes, other authors writing about U2 have largely neglected the musicological aspect of the work: ′The music, as usual, is relegated to the background, described in general terms if at all, even in the nuanced studies of the band by John Waters and Bill Flanagan, or those by Bill Graham and Niall Stokes that catalogue and annotate each album and track′(Fast, 2000, pp. 33–34).

In U2, music and religion are inexorably linked. Christian scholars such as Garrett and Neufeld write about U2's use of the scriptures from their own theological position, prescribing a Christian interpretation of the explicit and hidden meanings in its lyrics, live show and commitment to social justice issues. Timothy Neufeld (2018), notes Biblical references in U2's body of work can be found in some of its earliest recordings including the use of Jesus's name in the song. ′Tomorrow′ on the album *October*. U2's second single ′I Will Follow′ (*Boy,* 1980) has been described by the band members and academic researchers as being variously about God and Bono's mother, with those well versed in Christian theology proposing that the line, 'If you walk away, I will follow' evokes images of Christ and his disciples. Neufeld expresses a feeling of sincere personal connection to the band because of the way it blends "spiritual faith and social activism" (Neufeld, 2018, p. 141). As do other fan writers, he uses his own knowledge of faith, in this case Christianity, to find personally profound meaning in U2's work. In this thesis I will propose additional interpretations of ′I Will Follow′ from a Jewish perspective.

Deane Galbraith's writings provide a sound and comprehensive analysis of the biblical references in U2's work. Galbraith's papers and book chapters on U2, notably, 'Drawing Our Fish in the Sand' in the journal *Biblical Interpretation,* (2011); 'Fallen Angels in the Hands of U2' in *Exploring U2*, (2012); and 'Meeting God In the Sound' in *The Counter-Narratives of Radical Theology and Popular Music* (2014) touch on the Jewish roots of some of U2's references and imagery, but his approach is through a Christian frame. I agree with Galbraith that ′Contrary to the conclusions of many evangelical Christian writers, U2's biblical allusions are rarely explicit, typically employing "skilful disguise" to double code lyrics for their bifurcated audience of Christians and non-Christians. What makes allusion so amenable to such a goal is that the device, to adopt Umberto Eco's phrase, "does not invite all readers to the same party". So, by employing the device of biblical allusion, U2

is able to send a covert signal to Christian fans within lyrics that still make sense at the surface level to their wider audience. One audience member might hear a song of praise to God whereas another hears a song about a waitress´ (Galbraith, 2011, p. 187).

Galbraith (2014, pp.130–131) suggests a major reason for U2's success is because of their ´charismatic-evangelical background´ they have tapped into the religious current of ´Neo-Romanticism´ appealing to the ´spirituality´ of both Christians and the non-religious. ´When listeners enter into U2's musical soundscape they experience something beyond words, which due to the prevalence of Neo-Romanticism, they may be given to interpret as a "spiritual" experience. U2's indirect and ambiguous lyrics, fleeting allusions, and evocative music tend to appeal—in different, but not wholly different ways—both to those who profess to be "spiritual but not religious" and those who profess Christian belief." (Galbraith, 2014, pp. 130–131). While U2's sonic storytelling can perhaps be framed as reflecting Neo-Romantic interiority and individual experience, self-reflection is not a new phenomenon, and it can be argued that many of the stories contained in the Hebrew Bible are the inspiration for a type of narrative which encourages personal spiritual reflection. As has been suggested by scholars of the ancient Jewish musical tradition, using sound (whether vocal, instrumental or a combination of these) to lift the listener and create an emotional reaction can be traced back to the rites performed in the Hebrew Temple in ancient Jerusalem.

Neither a book about U2, nor the 'making of' the album, Catanzarite's 2007 *Achtung Baby: Meditations on Love in the Shadow of the Fall* (from the Bloomsbury Academic Press 33 and 1/3 series), is a succession of reflections from the author's perspective as a Catholic and a U2 fan. It is not a review or a historical overview of the band, and does not introduce any new ideas or information, and as such is not useful as a source for this thesis. Catanzarite draws on the writing of St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo and Fulton J Sheen and quotes notable Christians: St Paul, St John of the Cross and others while making no reference to theories about popular music or sociology. He notes ´Whether or not U2 as a group or any of its members as individuals are Christians in an orthodox sense… The band has never shied away from name-checking the Almighty and using explicitly Christian imagery´ (Catanzarite, 2007, p. xiv). As a practising Christian, Catanzarite asks, ´Are we obliged to read the story of Adam and Eve and the Fall of Man literally? That is certainly one possibility—and not entirely unreasonable. Speaking from my own faith tradition I believe it is wiser to read it as a poetic rendering of something very real´ (Catanzarite, 2007, p. 13). He acknowledges the

conflict between ‘science’ and ‘religion’ is a debate that takes in the role and use of music in the secular and spiritual. He writes, ′It seems perfectly plausible to me that God may have used an evolutionary process to create the world—and us. Since at least the time of Augustine, Catholics have not been obliged to read the creation account in Genesis literally′ (Catanzarite, 2007, p. 13). This position conflicts with the view of the ancient Hebrews who believe that the original Bible is the literal word of God.

4. The Intersection of Religion and Popular Music

John J. Thompson’s *Raised by Wolves—The Story of Christian Rock and Roll* documents the history of Christian rock from a largely autoethnographic viewpoint as Thompson identifies as ‘a Christian and a musician’ (Thompson, 2000, p. 14) and offers a perspective on rock music informed by his own lived experience, describing rock music as an ‘almost magical synthesis of beat, melody, countermelody and of course, volume’ (Thompson, 2000, p. 17). He observes that despite the proclamation by many Christian denominations and Church leaders that rock and roll is the ‘devil’s music’, musicians in the genre continue to consider themselves Christian and incorporate Biblical and other intertextual references into their lyrics, visual representations and performances. Christian rock has evolved over time into a genre of its own with a myriad of subgenres and subcultures.

The existence of Christian rock, however, does imply that all musicians who identify as Christian can be categorised under that banner. Thompson refers to the paucity of Christian-inspired pop music in the early 1960s, noting the turning point was when in 1965 The Byrds released their cover version of Pete Seeger’s ‘Turn! Turn! Turn!’, a song based on Ecclesiastes 3. Thompson says of the song, ‘For the first time in years, the Bible was being sourced for answers. Many hippies didn’t recognise the source of the words as they sang along, but Christians did.’ (Thompson, 2000, p. 25). He noted that in the late 1960s there were several pop songs that explicitly used the name of Jesus. Until then, inspirational songs referred to him as ‘Lord’ or ‘Him’…’ (Thompson, 2000, p. 25). Thompson says there are two eras that define Christianity in pop music: ‘before U2, and after U2’ (Thompson, 2000, p. 100). Given that U2 formed in the mid-1970s they certainly would have been exposed to the use of the Bible in the popular music they grew up with. With a case study on U2, and his non-evangelical tone, Thompson’s history of Christian pop and rock is instructive and useful.

The extent to which U2 is seen as 'belonging to' the Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) industry is demonstrated by references to U2 on the Gospel Music Association website, and in the scholarship of Christian music expert, Don Cusic, who writes about U2 in the 2009 *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Christian Music: Pop, Rock, and Worship*. Cusic asks: ´Is a rock band made up of Christians a Christian band? Is a rock band whose music and message are embraced by the contemporary Christian audience part of contemporary Christian music? The answers to those two questions determine whether or not someone believes that U2 belongs on a list of contemporary Christian music acts´. Cusic eventually comes to the conclusion that U2 is a band made up of ´Christians as individuals who separated themselves from the American Christian subculture; in essence, they were Christians outside of American Christianity.´ (Cusic, 2009, p 447)

This view of U2 persists, despite the secular activities of the individual band members. In *The Devil's Music* (2018) Randall. J. Stephens, a historian whose research topics include American history and theology, still claimed U2 as being of the 'God rock' movement (Stephens, 2018, p. 245). Stephens also claims that little attention has been paid to the ´fascinating world of Christianity, rock music, and pop culture´, (Stephens, 2018, p. 4) which again highlights the focus on genre and culture although he acknowledges ´artists like the postpunk U2…enriched their songs with Christian imagery and themes. These defied easy categorisation´ (Stephens, 2018, p. 26).

If, as John Covach argues, rock music is ´born out of controversy´ (Covach and Flory, 2012, p. 3), and that the beginnings and influences of rock are contested, then it is unsurprising that there would be conflict about who and what constitutes ´Christian rock´. Covach and others point to the bands Lifehouse and Creed as examples of the ´emergence of Christian rock in the American mainstream during the 1990s´ (Covach and Flory, 2012, p. 527) and assert the success of these bands demonstrates the reach of the Contemporary Christian Music industry, particularly in the USA, where a number of crossover acts achieve mainstream chart success and sales. Some in the Contemporary Christian Music industry include U2 as one of the most successful and influential Christian groups, yet U2 has always been reluctant to embrace that label. There are limitless examples of artists who do not identify as part of the Contemporary Christian Music industry or the ´Christian music movement´, whose music has been influenced by Christianity.

Despite Contemporary Christian Music being seen primarily as a North American movement, there is a solid tradition of Christians in the UK expressing themselves through rock ´n´ roll. The Greenbelt Arts Festival, which is billed as an 'arts, faith and justice festival' was founded in 1974 in the UK (and is still being staged as an annual gathering in 2025) and has featured music from the outset, including a performance by U2 in 1981. In 1988 a group of Festival participants published a volume of papers they had presented at the festival under the title 'Dancing in the Dragon's Jaws'. Long-time Greenbelt participant Martin Wroe, author, journalist, a friend of U2 and now Church of England pastor wrote in the Introduction: ´This book is not written by clerics who think that rock music is a prime weapon of the Devil to lure "young people" to destruction in the twentieth century´ (Wroe, 1988, p. 1). Wroe notes that rock music and culture were regarded as the territory of the Devil, and that there was a great chasm between Christianity and rock music. In 1990 the chasm was already narrowing, with Greenbelt being described as the biggest 'Christian music' festival in Europe. Tony Cummings (*Crossrhythms*, 1990) wrote, ´it is contemporary music which has seen Greenbelt emerge from the parochial fringes of an evangelical subculture to become an internationally known Festival´.

5. Jewish Music

Judeo-Christianity is popularly described as the dominant culture and philosophical foundation of Western society and is referenced as such by Bono in his 2022 memoir, *Surrender* (pp. 203–204). Judaism began in the Levant, with Christianity and Islam subsequently evolving from Jewish roots and incorporating some of the features of Jewish religious practice and custom. 'Judeo-Christianity' is a contested term as some Jewish scholars argue its use obscures Judaism by inextricably linking Judaism with Christianity when the two religions have volubly different practices, including historically different musical traditions. Discussion about 'Jewish music' and 'Christian music' is useful for this thesis to establish the framework for analysis and exploration of the influence of music described in the Hebrew Bible and played during the Temple times, and how elements of that music can be found in popular music today.

Within Judaism there are various sub-cultural and ethnic groups and defining 'Jewish Music' is a complex task. The terms Ashkenazi, Mizrachi and Sephardi are commonly used

to describe Jews from variously Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, and Spain, with each community having their own variations of customs (called 'minhagim') and language, with Yiddish spoken in European communities, Ladino spoken by Sephardic Jews and variants of Judeo-Arabic or Judeo-Farsi spoken by Mizrachi Jews. In some Jewish traditions, music and art were banned because of their association with the Temple, as the Rabbis taught acts of worship that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem should not be performed until the Temple is rebuilt. Jewish music historians such as A. Z. Idelsohn and Edwin Seroussi note that prior to the 18th Century, Jews of Western Europe were ´musically illiterate´ (Seroussi, 2017, p. 719) while their contemporaries in Islamic lands were lauded performers and composers.

As the central text for Judaism and a foundation document for all Abrahamic faiths, the Hebrew Bible is often said to be a blueprint for mainstream Western society. The written word is the most powerful and enduring legacy of the Jewish people; however, the music of the Hebrew Bible is difficult to prove because it was not preserved, and there are no specific instructions on how to perform it. Using the Bible itself as a source document that describes the religious music practice of the time, and by referencing the oral and written traditions of the Jewish people, musicologists and historians have pieced together certain elements of music of the Temple times. Attempts to recreate the music of the Hebrew Bible have had varying results and the outputs are contested.

Researchers have drawn on descriptions in the Biblical text itself to reconstruct the instruments that were used by the ancient Jews during the time of the Temple in Jerusalem (c. 500 BCE). For example, the Hebrew Music Museum in Jerusalem has replicated the instruments of early Israeli religious music and simulates music practice according to what is described in the Hebrew Bible. The Hebrew Music Museum's realisation of the music itself, as it sounded and was performed, can also only be imagined based on the information gleaned from the original Biblical text. The system of cantillation marks known as ta'amim (literally 'tastes') were codified in text around the 9th Century CE by the Masoretic scholars (Jacobson, 2017, p 12), at the same time as vowels were introduced, and various Jewish communities interpret these marks musically according to their tradition, and according to the liturgical calendar, and are sung with different melodies at different services to mark distinctions. This tradition is passed down orally in communities.

For Jews during the time of the Temple, exposure to music and community was through prescribed models of religious and social practice. Seroussi notes, ´Pre-modern music was thoroughly related to and dependent on its performative contexts… Musical rituals were not circumscribed to formalised religious events (i.e. liturgies). Instrumental music or language set to music (mostly sung poetry) were part of sanctioned public displays of social order´ (Seroussi, 2017, pp 718–719). According to the Hebrew Bible, specific roles were allocated to the Jewish tribes with the Levites responsible for music and song. Various passages of the Bible describe the role of the Levites, including descriptions of instruments played and their role in ritual ceremonies (1 Chronicles, Ch 29). As Rabbi Sacks mentions, ´Psalm 19 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands . . . There is no speech, there are no words, where their voice is not heard. Their music[3] carries throughout the earth, their words to the end of the world." Beneath the silence, audible only to the inner ear, creation sings to its Creator.´

The destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem had a significant effect on the practice and preservation of Judaism, as the ritual sacrifices and acts that could only be performed by the High Priests in the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the Tabernacle, were no longer able to be performed. The Jewish people went into mourning, and still to this day commemorate the 9th of Av on the Hebrew calendar, as the most solemn day in the annual calendar (usually corresponding to July or August in the Gregorian calendar). The Jewish mourning ritual for deceased relatives includes abstinence from celebrating and listening to music for a period of 12 months afterwards. Following the destruction of the Temple, the Jewish people went into collective mourning; the Rabbis banned music in worship services and Jews were prohibited from using musical instruments during those times.

The significance of the Hebrew Temple in the evolution of Western 'sacred music' is highlighted by Swain's chronology which begins with the rule of King David, whom he refers to as the 'traditional author and composer of the Book of Psalms', in approximately 1,000 BCE. It notes that in 420 BCE, synagogues were established and 'divine service ordained by the Sanhedrin etc' (Swain, 2016, p. xvii). From this divine service, certain practices have survived and been adapted since the destruction of the temple—the dispersion of the Jews from the Middle East, and the rise of Christianity—which included using many of the original rituals and words of the Hebrew Bible. The importance of knowing the history of

music is highlighted by the European Music Archaeology Project which states on its website´s landing page: ´Music is the "sound-evidence" of Europe's ancient common roots.´

Elements of the Hebrew tradition have influenced Western secular and sacred music throughout the ages. The use of music in liturgical practice and song, vocal harmony, the cantor (lead singer) as conductor, the physical positioning of the musicians at the front of the worshipers, and the ecstatic response of the worshipers. Even the rise and fall of a typical rock concert, where elements of the synagogue service are replicated through moments of deep reflection and a joined-in refrain, bears a similarity to what we know of the Temple service, which begins when the audience has gathered and the performers (or priests) are on the stage guiding the proceedings.

Idelsohn describes Jewish music as both ´synagogue´ and ´folk´ music, defining it essentially as, ´Jewish music created by Jews for Jews´ (Idelsohn, 1972, p. 417). He asserts that Jewish musicians, as members of a Diaspora community, are largely influenced by the dominant culture of where they reside, however as Amon Shiloah argues, Idelsohn's work is not definitive and can be contested. A pivotal point of Shiloah's argument is that Idelsohn's work focused on the Jewish musical tradition that emanated from Yemen, and on the similarity between the Yemenite tradition and that of the Gregorian chant. Shiloah notes Lachmann's thesis on Tunisian music and his study of the Jewish community on the Isle of Djerba brought a different perspective to the study of Oriental Jewish tradition (Shiloah, 1992, pp. 32-32), finding Lachmann's ethnomusicological research illuminated the connection between Jewish and Muslim culture, focusing on perspectives outside of the common academic studies of church music and Jewish music.

Seroussi argues that in early modernity, music could denote ethnicity but says 'such denotation was not rooted in biological reductionism or its concealed offspring, nationalism, as happened in the modern period' (Seroussi, 2015, p. 719). Even within the three main streams of Judaism (Orthodox, Reform and Conservative), there are different musical customs according to where the community is based and what tradition it follows. In conventional Orthodox synagogues, musical instruments are not played due to laws prohibiting 'work' on the Sabbath, from Friday at sunset to Saturday one hour after sunset. The prohibition includes playing or using tools or instruments during the Sabbath, which is when the weekly communal synagogue services are conducted. In Orthodox Judaism, women

are not permitted to sing publicly, except when reciting certain prayers. Schleifer notes that composed polyphony was first introduced into synagogue music in Europe somewhere before 1622, by Salomone di Rossi of Mantua (Schleifer, 1994, p. 43), but this innovation did not develop until after Rossi's death. During the 18th century some European synagogues permitted instrumental music including the organ, but playing instruments, using amplification and recorded music is still banned during the Sabbath in Orthodox communities today. What is not ordinarily prohibited, however, is keeping time with one's feet, tapping on tables, or swaying in a rhythmic manner, as these cannot be mistaken for work and are viewed as a physical expression of full immersion in prayer.

In the 20th and 21st centuries most individuals who identify as Jewish have had at least some exposure to religious synagogue practice. This is largely because all Orthodox male Jews and non-Orthodox females and males are expected to recite the portion of the Torah that corresponds to their birth date in a public arena when they turn 13 (boys) or 12 (girls) and have their bar or bat mitzvah. Learning a Torah portion is time-consuming, and study usually starts months before the bar or bat mitzvah. Students are instructed by rabbis or others who have a founding in Jewish studies and tradition. In this way both the oral tradition and written text is preserved and passed down from generation to generation. As Taruskin notes, ´To learn to read ta'amim one must have a teacher to instruct one orally in the matching of sign and sound´ (Taruskin, 2005, Ch 1). Importantly the recitation of the portion is sung or chanted in accordance with the traditional Trope, marks of ´Biblical accents used to indicate the form in Hebrew cantillation´ (Swain, 2016, p. 273).

6. The Influence of the Hebrew Bible on Popular Song Lyrics

The primary influence of the Hebrew Bible on Western secular and sacred music is through lyrics, particularly psalms and hymns: ´In addition to the main outlines of the liturgy, the body of responsorial and antiphonal psalmody, the reciting formulas, and the hymns, and other Jewish elements became important in Western church music: the class of songs originally used in the Hebrew synagogue as refrains, for example on the word "amen" or "alleluia" (sic)" (Grout, 1960, p. 19). Ben-Sorek found that within the Greek New Testament, 93 passages from the Psalms are quoted, and in the Roman Catholic Mass only the Psalms are used (Ben-Sorek, 1967, p. 3). Unsurprisingly, Ben-Sorek came to the conclusion that many theologians view the Psalms as the most important writing in the Hebrew Bible.

The early Christian Church leaders associated instrumental music with Greek and Roman secular entertainment (Dowley, 2018, p. 47) and wanted to ban it … as being the result of the need to establish separation between Christian and Pagan practices (Grout, 1960, p. 27). However, the Church was faced with a dilemma—believing music without words could not carry Christian teachings, instrumental music was banned, however they could then not explain the references to musical instruments contained in the Psalms. They did this, according to Grout, by using allegory: 'The tongue is the "psaltery" of the Lord… by the "harp" we must understand the mouth… the "organ" is our body' (Grout, 1960, p. 25 quoting Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History,* 1950, New York, p. 86).

There are other elements of Christian religious practice that have their roots in Judaism, for example, as Taruskin notes: ´The Sanctus is a biblical acclamation (from the book of Isaiah). Under its Hebrew name, Kedusha, it has been part of the Jewish worship service since ancient times, whence it was taken over by the earliest Christians as the congregation's part of the "eucharistic" (thanksgiving) prayer' (Taruskin, 2004, Ch 2). The transcription of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, and then from Greek to Latin, and then eventually to English was lauded by Christians for allowing deeper study and understanding of the book. This especially applied to the use of the Bible in song and prayer. However, the translations have not been without issue, as Hebrew words are not generally able to be directly translated into other languages. For example, Taruskin asserts that these mistranslations have affected the meaning and use of the book by Christians: ´The twelfth verse of Psalm 91 (according to the numbering in the standard Latin Bible, known as the Vulgate, translated by St. Jerome in the late fourth century) was especially favoured in the liturgy, perhaps owing to its vivid similes. It crops up time and again in many contexts, running the full stylistic gamut of Gregorian chant from the barest "liturgical recitative" to the most flamboyant jubilation. In the "original" Latin the verse reads, "Justus ut palma florebit, et sicut cedrus Libani multiplicabitur". In the Authorized (King James) Version of 1611, long the standard English translation (in which the parent Psalm carries the number 92), it reads, "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon"´ (Taruskin, 2004, Ch 1). This misnumbering of Psalms is a small example of distinct translational errors between Jewish and Christian Biblical texts, while mistranslations of Isaiah are often used as a way to justify the messianic status of Jesus in Christian theology.

It is commonly observed that the use of music, particularly vocal music, has been a persistent feature of all Christian denominations, and a number of authors such as Grout, Dowley and Taruskin have laid out the history of Western music (Grout and Taruskin) and Christian music (Dowley), using the same general terms. In the *Historical Dictionary of Sacred Music,* Swain states the four ´most important developments in the history of sacred music in the West´ are as follows: ´the disassociation of the sacred semantic in music… from Biblical text itself´; ´the invention of polyphony around 1,000 CE´; the Reformation; and the invention of opera, which ´once and for all´ marked the difference between secular 'court' music and sacred 'church' music. (Swain, 2016, pp. 4–5).

The Reformation brought about change not just to the Church but to ´society at large´ (Leaver, 1994, p. 125). Up until this point in time sacred music had been the exclusive domain of the clergy. The German Lutheran and English Elizabethan churches featured professional musicians and composers, and as Leaver notes, the printing press made it relatively easy to circulate liturgies, hymns and other congregational songs. Sutcliffe also observes that music-makers were dependent on sponsorship, and until printing technology became accessible and allowed the reproduction of music scores, composers relied on the patronage of the 'church or court' (Sutcliffe, 1994). The printing press therefore allowed musicians to make a living from music and aided the development of ´Western music´ through the intertwining of court music, secular music and Church music.

Throughout the history of Christianity, the use of singing and instruments in church worship has been the focus of debate, falling in and out of favour and usage depending on the views of the various Church leaders of the time. There are many different denominations of Christianity throughout the world, and as with Judaism, practices vary according to location and community, each with its own ´ethos and approach to worship´ (Dowley, 2018, p. 260). The extent to which these communities use singing and instruments has much to do with the tradition of their specific denomination and how they interpret the Bible, as for example with the Church of Christ which does not allow the use of instruments in worship. However, the use of Psalms has remained constant in Christian practice, and Psalms remain embedded in the liturgy of all Christian denominations.

The influence of Psalms extends into other areas of Christian worship too. As Dowley notes, by the 19th Century most English-speaking Protestant churches were using Psalms in

their services, with only the Anglican Church holding out against hymn-singing in favour of the recitation of Psalms until 1861. It was not until the mid-1950s that Christians around the world began producing church music in their own local languages (Dowley, 2018, p. 198). Since the Renaissance, music and artistic expression have become increasingly associated with secular, liberal thought; however there is historical evidence that Western music is still hugely influenced by the Hebrew Bible and the music of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

7. Jewish Music and Popular Music

In the Introduction to the *Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music*, published in 2017, editors Marcus Moberg and Christopher Partridge suggest, 'The relationship between popular music and religion is an emerging, but still neglected, area of study within the general discipline of "critical musicology"'. Their anthology focuses on the ways in which music interacts with society and culture, reflecting both the interdisciplinary and multi-methodological nature of scholarship about popular music. Moberg and Partridge suggest research in critical musicology has meant more attention being focused on the ´discourses of the sacred and profane´ in popular music culture, but acknowledge that the growing body of literature on the subject largely focuses on popular music culture's 'obvious' references to religious thought and practice.

Emerging research about the connection between religion and popular music is largely segmented by centring denominations and artists or music genres. In *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religion and Popular Music,* chapters on protest, censorship and feminism largely focus on their intersection with Christianity from an autoethnographic Western perspective. Andy Bennett's chapter, 'Ethnography, Popular Music and Religion' considers the application of ethnographic research principles to the study of popular music and religion, arguing that techniques such as participant and non-participant observation, one-on-one interviews and 'insider research' are useful but have their limitations, particularly as they typically use small sample sizes. Within the field of popular music studies, the focus on denominations such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism, limits the potential scope of some research and can skew the discourse.

An example of the segmentation in the discourse about religion and popular music can be observed in the canon on Bob Dylan. Michael J Gilmour in *The Bloomsbury*

Handbook of Religion and Popular Music, chapter entitled, 'The Bible and Popular Music' asks why 'music of the last fifty or so years draws on language, themes and imagery from the Christian Bible?' (Gilmour, 2017, p. 67) solely referencing the Christian New Testament not the Jewish Tanakh which predates it. He writes that 'The Bible's 'fingerprints' are everywhere in popular music, without acknowledging the Jewish roots of that doctrine. He analyses Dylan's use of Ezekiel in the lyrics for ´All Along the Watchtower´ entirely from a Christian point of view, without referencing Tanakh, and he writes of Dylan's reference to the Book of Revelation without acknowledging the Hebrew Bible—or Dylan's Jewish identity.

Conversely, in the same book, Jon Stratton's chapter on 'Jews, Judaism and Popular Music', extrapolates on Dylan's use of the Hebrew Bible in ´All Along the Watchtower´ and notes Dylan's 'close connections with Judaic thought' (Stratton, 2017, p. 125), but again does not make the link between practice in ancient Israel and modern use of the Bible. On the other hand, Flory's 2012 chapter, 'Postmodern prophecy: Bob Dylan and the practices of self-subversion', in *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture* explains ancient Hebrew 'prophecy' but again in the context of popular culture, rather than music, noting similarities in the structure and purpose of ancient Biblical prophets and particular artists of the postmodern era, such as Dylan (Flory, 2012, p. 204).

In both popular and scholarly literature the Jewish aspects of popular music are often referred to as being an extension of Tin Pan Alley and Jewish immigration to the USA, or in relation to particular artists who happen to be Jewish, for example in Gottlieb's *Funny, It Doesn't Sound Jewish: How Yiddish Songs and Synagogue Melodies Influenced Tin Pan Alley*; Hersch*, Swinging Hava Nagila: 'Jewish Jazz" and Jewish Identity*, a number of biographies about Leonard Cohen and Bob Dylan, and in Steven Lee Beeber's *The Heebie-Jeebies at CBGB's: A Secret History of Jewish Punk*.

Alan Moore suggests that "It has become common currency among musicologists of popular music to worry about maintaining the twin positions of fan and scholar. One starting point for this investigation was to try to observe my own becoming a fan, with respect to one particular example. The second was an abiding interest in the application of sacred imagery to secular contexts within popular culture" (Moore, 2018, p. 86). In assessing the use of the word 'hallelujah' in rock songs by artists including Cohen and U2, Moore may have found

insight in the writings of the Jewish sages. Instead, Moore refers to Cohen as a 'practising Buddhist', proposing that his Buddhism greatly influenced his ´hallelujah´, minimising Cohen's Jewishness and largely overlooking the influences on his work that are deeply rooted in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition. Moore does not examine the original meaning and use of the sacred word in the context of the Hebrew Temple, and how it has been transposed from the Hebrew Bible to becoming a ubiquitous lyric in modern popular music. Allan Light's 2013 *The Holy or the Broken—Leonard Cohen, Jeff Buckley and the Unlikely Ascent of "Hallelujah"* ascribes a pertinent, if less academic, significance to Cohen's song and quotes Bono describing 'hallelujah' as 'a very powerful word, a big idea, and I've hung on to it very tightly over the years' (Light, 2013, p. 228). I write more about the genesis and use of 'hallelujah' in U2's live performance in Chapter 6.

At times academic scholars of U2 position the band's songs as Christian in order to make U2 relevant to their own disciplines, such as using Middleton's approach of combining cultural and musicological theories to support their methodology, for example Helena Montes García Torres' 2014 dissertation, ´Nicely-polished looking glasses: A comparative study of U2 and Joyce's Dublin in "Eveline" and "Running to Stand Still".´ Deane Galbraith noted in 2011 that the dominant analysis of U2 is by Christian scholars and their understanding of U2 relies on examining the lyrics and drawing connections (dubious or otherwise) to the Christian interpretation of the Bible.

In non-musicological popular music analysis, there is a tendency to focus on words of songs, and how those words are explained by the artists, as the primary conveyance of meaning; however as Ibrahim Abraham notes, using literary theory and analysis is often at the expense of in-depth analysis of the music. Abraham says, ´The primary units of study are songs, typically furnished with journalistic commentaries or biographies. These songs end up being treated as primarily literary objects, with a few nods towards the music,´ (Abraham, 2015, p. 242).

Ibrahim Abraham comments that it has become fashionable for social scientists to reject the 'vital social force of Scripture' (Abraham, 2015, p. 242). While many of the references in U2's lyrics and music have Biblical allusions, even the most dedicated Christian-influenced scholar fans admit that some of these references are unintentional, and many are found only by paying close attention to lyrics and finding hints and nods towards

Biblical themes. Abraham says the work of the 'fan-scholars… mirrors that of biblical scholars, carefully dissecting what they treat as a literary text in search of a deeper meaning'. (Abraham, 2015, p. 244). Abraham is not convinced by the argument made by Galbraith and others that there is deliberate 'double-coding' in the lyrics of U2. He suggests a 'sociological reading… can help the reception history of popular music move beyond its current foci', arguing that U2's music is 'consumed according to the genre norms of commercial rock n roll' (Abraham, 2015, p. 244).

Lisa Crafton's *Tangle of Matter and Ghost: U2, Leonard Cohen, and Blakean Romanticism* (2018) finds the connection between Romantic poet, William Blake, Leonard Cohen and U2 through their artistic engagement with ´social and cultural protest, the conflation of erotic/spiritual love, and the representation of the rupture of that symbiosis, especially in the poetic treatment of Judas, Yahweh, and Jesus´ as evidence—not of Christianity, but a commitment political protest. Crafton finds a link between the Romantic poet and the two popular musicians: ´Both U2 and Cohen similarly rely on this kind of poetic ambiguity of point of view and multiple speakers. Through their representations of Judas, Yahweh, and Satan, both artists arrest listeners with betrayals of divine love and human inability to accept the truth of the erotic/divine continuum´ (Crafton, 2018, p. 73). Crafton's methodology is well-defined and her perspective adds much to academic discourse in connecting different aspects of the works of the three artists; however, there is room for a deep exploration of the ancient Hebrew practices that have informed so much of the writing by the two contemporary musical artists.

Rupert Till in his 2010 publication, *Pop Cult: Religion and Popular Music* says 'popular music is like, or linked to, religion', but the focus of his analysis is on the culture and cultish nature of popular music rather than music and religion: The *who, what, when* and *where* but not the 'why'. Nevertheless, Till's research is useful as he provides context about the development of rock from blues and gospel and the contradictions between Christianity and secular music. Till says, ´Blues was presented as a secular method of escaping the difficulties of life for African Americans. Whereas gospel music offered a hope that in a mythical or spiritual future, in heaven, the difficulties of life would be left behind…´ (Till, 2010, pp. 172 - 173). Rock 'n' roll and pop music is hugely influenced by blues and gospel, particularly in America. However, there is still noticeable segregation in how genres are marketed and who they are marketed to, through segmentation of artists in music streaming apps, radio and sales

charts with rock and pop still predominantly ‘White’, and blues and gospel (along with R&B and rap) being ‘Black’.

Then there is the following thought from Rabbi Sacks:

> Every text and every time has, in Judaism, its own specific melody. So, when we pray, we do not read: we sing. When we engage with sacred texts, we do not recite: we chant. There are different tunes for shacharit, mincha and ma’ariv, the morning, afternoon, and evening prayers. There are different melodies and moods for the prayers for a weekday, Shabbat, the three pilgrimage festivals, Pesach, Shavuot and Succot (which have much musically in common but also tunes distinctive to each), and for the Yamim Noraim, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur… Jewish texts and times are not colour-coded but music-coded. The map of holy words is written in melodies and songs. (2015)

8. Conclusion

In his 2002 analysis of U2, Allan F. Moore argued that "the desire to find a 'spiritual quality' within music" is a Western concept that emerged from Romanticism in the early nineteenth century. Moore raises several pertinent questions: "But why talk about finding spirituality in rock music itself, rather than in rock lyrics? Are there elements within U2's musical structures that somehow embody spirituality? What does spirituality mean in this context?" He subsequently examines U2's spirituality through an exclusively Christian lens, whereas he may have considered the influences of ancient Judaic and Islamic traditions, as well as those from the Middle East and Africa, on both popular music and U2 specifically. While Judeo-Christian culture is commonly described as the dominant influence in Western society, it is important to note that both Christianity and Islam evolved from Judaism, incorporating elements of Jewish religious practices and societal customs.

This study sets out to examine the influence of Jewish biblical traditions on U2's body of work, considering the anthropological and musicological development of U2's sound and its characterisation as a 'spiritual' band. By adopting a Jewish lens rather than the predominantly Christian framework typically applied by fans and scholars, this research aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the spiritual elements in U2's music and highlight the enduring influence of ancient Jewish traditions on contemporary popular

culture. The focus of this thesis is not to simply analyse the band members' statements about U2's music, nor to discuss how the four individuals' religious affiliations or belief systems have affected their body of work, as some other scholars have done. Instead, this research aims to identify gaps in the current knowledge about U2 to make an original contribution to scholarship about this notable band. Therefore, establishing a link between U2 and the Hebrew Bible demonstrates how this ancient society and belief system continues to resonate with secular Western society and pervades popular music and culture, both directly and indirectly.

CHAPTER 2: Methodology

As stated in the conclusion to the Literature Review, an interdisciplinary approach to studying U2's music may offer new insights into the band's journey. Therefore, in developing a methodology for this study consideration has been given to the disciplines of musicology, religious studies, and cultural analysis. I cross-referenced lyrics with versions of the Hebrew Bible on sefaria.org, using the *Koren Jerusalem Bible*, Sefaria Community Translation and the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) versions, the writings of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the *Artscroll Tanach Series* and other Jewish philosophers to determine the significance of these words and further support the case that the interplay of words and phrases infers a connection between U2 and Jewish Biblical symbols, text and thought.

1. Popular Music Methodologies

Popular music has been analysed through various approaches over time. In the early period of popular music scholarship, academics often applied traditional methods of Western musicology to study popular songs. These methodologies aim to dissect and understand the complexities of popular music compositions and performances. In *Recording Analysis, How the Record Shapes the Song*, Moylan (2020, p.152) highlights a fundamental limitation in traditional musicological approaches: Conventional notation captures only basic elements, like pitch and rhythm, within structured frameworks, while critical aspects of the actual listening experience such as tempo fluctuations, dynamic nuances, expressive qualities, orchestration choices, and timbral variations are reduced to imprecise symbols and verbal directions that performers must interpret subjectively. This disconnect between written representation and auditory reality underscores why traditional music analysis can fall short when applied to popular music, where recorded performance often carries as much artistic significance as compositional elements.

Middleton (2000, pp. 59–88) argues that popular music is most commonly a collaborative effort involving various contributors such as lyricists, songwriters, singers, instrumentalists, arrangers, orchestrators, producers, engineers, set designers, and video directors, among others. The transmission of these musical talents among musicians relies heavily on aural and oral communication, surpassing the significance of written scores. In contemporary music,

notation is infrequently used, and when it is, it tends to serve as a sketch, outline, starting point, or as an attempt to capture what has already been achieved in performance or recording studios. For example, the published score to U2's ´Gone´[3] (*Pop*) is technically accurate but the feeling evoked by Bono's performance of the song cannot be fully replicated without any prior knowledge of how it is delivered live, or on record, because the singer's persona can change according to the place and time it is performed, and the score cannot capture such nuance.

In popular and rock music there are many elements that make up the 'text'. Focusing solely on music notation to decode the song will miss crucial cultural and creative elements, such as where and why the song was written, who performed it, and the technology and personnel involved in the production. Furthermore, many songs that are classified as 'popular' may appear to follow particular patterns in their form, and have structural, sonic and lyrical similarities, but the application of the tools of traditional classical music notation cannot precisely capture the nuance and meaning of the song—which is better understood by foregrounding the listeners, the performers and the context.

Those musicologists who acknowledge the limitations of Western notation as the basis of analysis have subsequently looked to find other ways to understand popular songs, developing methods of interpretation and evaluation more commensurate with how popular music is written and produced. Popular music scholars have experimented with different techniques and methodologies, and as Moylan also notes, have found the most useful of these approaches are multidisciplinary, and see the analysis of the song as being multidimensional. In *Song Means* (2016, pp. 5-6) Allan Moore argues, ´too often… interpretations are made without adequate anchorage of an actual aural experience of the song´, however he also proposes that there is no 'right or wrong' way to analyse popular music. French musicologist Catherine Rudent says that 'at the heart' of popular songs is the voice (Rudent, 2020), while others, such as Richard Middleton argue that the very concept of ´popular´ music is based in class and culture and as such it must be analysed in that context (Middleton, 1990, p. 7).

In *Disruptive Divas* (2002) Melisse LaFrance suggests, ´A reader-oriented approach allows us to see how the meaning of any one cultural text is unstable, indeterminate, and

[3] ´Gone', lyrics by Bono and the Edge, music by U2. Hal Leonard, 'U2 The Best of 1990-2000' Piano/Vocal/Guitar

multifaceted´ (Lafrance, 2002, p. 26) and as such, analysis can be undertaken by using a number of methodologies, none of which will find absolute meaning. Depending on the listener, love can be happy or sad. If the listener is the centre, and the song only has meaning because of the listener, then the meaning of the song has to be fluid. While the Western music frame sees everything according to the value ascribed to individual notes and lyrics, songs are similarly categorised. To understand popular music supposes a familiarity with words and sounds that we recognise as words and music.

Sociologists such as Bill Rolston, who refers to U2 in a 2001 paper, talks about the power of pop music to speak for, and to, a community, noting that if popular music is speaking to a particular community it can also result in exclusion. The conclusion that can be drawn from these works is that no matter what approach is taken to scholarly analysis, is that music is not just about notes and words; it is about culture and context, whether it is opera, classical, K-pop or Christian rock, and that all analysis is contestable. In concert with Moylan, Lori Burns finds that despite the challenges of cross-disciplinary research, almost all useful popular music scholarship is cross-academic, incorporating elements, methodologies and concepts not just from Musicology and Cultural Studies, but from Literary Studies, Religion, Neuroscience and countless other disciplines (Burns, 2002, p. 33).

A common approach to music analysis, particularly in sociology, is to group artists into albums or songs in genres or categories. This type of sorting has its basis in marketing and is useful for selling music, but in terms of artistic analysis comparing one musician or group to another, or grouping songs together based on common lyrical or musical characteristics does a disservice to artists and listeners. Analysing a particular artist at a point in time, considering production techniques and the technology and events occurring at the time the work was written, rarely takes into account the influences on individual artists that have occurred over their entire lifetime. Establishing a distinct methodology to analyse music according to whether it is pop, rock or Western art music is therefore difficult, because it entails categorising music—and that in itself is rarely straightforward. Songs cannot simply be segmented and allocated to a genre according to their tone, chords, length, lyrics or rhythm, particularly as music is now so often stored and accessed digitally.

Popular musicologists may focus on one song, or one album or live performance, for example the chapter on U2's ´Gloria´ (Koozin, 2022)*;* and Lori Burns, (2016)´The Concept

Album as Visual-Sonic-Textual Spectacle: The Transmedial Storyworld of Coldplay's *Mylo Xyloto´*; plus Alek et al (2020), A Critical Discourse Analysis of Song, ´Look What You Made Me Do´ as well as chapters on Tori Amos, Courtney Love, Meshell Ndegeocello and P. J. Harvey in *Disruptive Divas,* edited by Burns and Lafrance.

In such studies the performance, voice, melody, notation, lyrics and production are considered, often by comparing songs by the same artist. For example, David Laing compares several of Buddy Holly's songs to illustrate his points about Musicology and Semiotics in the 1990 book edited by Frith and Goodwin, *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* in which he discusses the importance of vocal style and the way the singer uses the lyrics, while avoiding descriptions based on the conventions of Western music notation. Another approach is to map the use of words and explore the relevance and validity of studying individual words in lyrics, to find meaning and build a narrative about an artist's intent and worldview.

There is also an argument in musicological scholarship that suggests it is possible to determine combinations of chords, melodies or notes that can elicit certain emotions, however this type of analysis rarely takes into account the experience of the audience, and the anticipation a certain lyric or coda can evoke, or the different responses of hardcore fans and casual listeners. Nor does it account for the interaction between the performer and the audience and the persona of the singer, projected or otherwise. For example, a version of ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ might use the same notes, melody and words, but is unlikely to have the same emotional impact on someone hearing it on the radio for the first time in 2023 as it does for someone who has followed the band for 40 years and is experiencing it performed live by U2 complete with the staging, sound, video and lighting effects, and the reaction of fellow audience members.

Allan Moore's contribution to *The Pop Palimpset*, ´The Bitter Taste of Praise: Singing "Hallelujah"' exemplifies this: he argues that Bono's singing ´Hallelujah´ on the *Elevation* tour and rising to a major third has a 'clear' effect on audiences (Moore, 2018, p. 102). This supposes that every individual member of the audiences hears, reacts and understands the musical code in the same way.

Approaches that centre the listener take into account the feelings and interpretations of

the song, and acknowledge that meaning can be entirely different according to the social and cultural background of the individual, their musical influences, knowledge of music, where they hear the music and their mood, among other factors. In popular music, the 'success' of the song is the sum of all the elements. The way the voice, music and words work together must all be considered when ascribing meaning to the song. Close listening—that is, repeated, intense, focused listening—to the music and the way it is produced, and understanding the historical development of popular music, affords a greater understanding of how the song came to be and why it is worthy of analysis.

Trevor Le Clercq embraces ambiguity in comparing studies of U2's 'One' by Harris and Endrinal, providing a clear example of two different approaches to analysis, both of which he finds are valid. Le Clercq is interested in 'conflicting perceptual clues' and provides evidence that the way we hear music is greatly influenced by our own individual readings. Furthermore, Le Clercq's research found that variation in interpretation is common, even though 'analysts might not often wildly disagree on the form of song' (Le Clercq, 2017, p. 1). Whether a particular scholarly interpretation rings true, or has any merit, can only be determined by the individual experiencing/listening to the music and the musicians themselves, but sometimes artists are unaware of the intertextual nature of their music, having chosen to use sounds and ideas that are subconscious or that spark unintended memories, thoughts and associations.

In ascribing academically robust meaning to a song, if the song itself and the listener can be treated equally, it is likely that when there is more than one listener there will be more than one meaning. Songs impart messages both with and without intention through the combination of lyrics, music and context, and the interpretation is constructed in the mind of the receiver. The listener hears and *feels* music according to their own impression of the song, and their pre-programmed understanding of music and lyrics. For example, a song may instinctively be heard as sad until the listener pays close attention to the lyrics and is informed by visuals accompanying a release, interviews with the creators and even the places where the song is played, which direct the listener to feel otherwise about it. Meaning can be created and interrogated in a myriad of ways, including using words as data and symbolism that can be deconstructed according to any number of parameters.

Moberg and Partridge (2017, p. 4) note 'text-based' approaches are commonly used in

studies of religion and popular music, finding that when studying the text 'scholars of popular music focus just as much, if not more so, on the music itself, on the sonic environment as they do the lyrics'. It is commonly agreed in popular music scholarship that the listener and the musician both hear and feel music in different ways and, as Moore suggests, the 'experience' of the song is an essential element of the text. In 'The Bitter Taste of Praise: Singing "Hallelujah"', Moore considers the music and the words, describing the feelings invoked by songs that use the word 'hallelujah' concluding, 'The power of the song, then, lies less in its music than in the combination of the lyrics and the way they are vocally articulated' (Moore, 2018, p. 88).

2. Intertextuality: the Hebrew Bible in popular music

Intertextuality is the actual presence of one text within another (Lacasse, 2000, pp. 35–58) and Allan F. Moore states, 'In music studies intertextuality has long been recognised as a crucial theoretical construct… (and) it needs to receive a focus that it rarely does' (Moore, 2016, p. 272). In popular music this intertextuality can be found in the music and lyrics, often through electronic sampling, and incorporating and recreating elements of the works of other artists. Writing about intertextuality in popular music, Lacasse provides the following definitions: 'quotation' is when the text is modified; 'allusion' hints at another text, and 'hypertext' is the production of a new text (hypertext) from a previous one (hypotext) (Lacasse, 2000, pp. 35–58.).

The Hebrew Bible features heavily in Western popular music in all these forms, as it is a central text of Western society and culture, with biblical imagery appearing in large swathes of music and popular culture. The Psalms of the Hebrew Bible are considered by many to be 'songs', however there is no conclusive archaeological evidence regarding the music that accompanied them, why the Psalms were written, or if indeed they were intended to be sung, despite the efforts of musicologists including Hayek-Ventura to prove otherwise. This ambiguity makes it difficult to analyse Psalms as songs at all, and therefore they are usually examined through a religious and/or literary frame, rather than a musical one.

In the edited volume *The Pop Palimpsest: Intertextuality in Recorded Popular Music* Burns and Lacasse argue ´Musical intertextuality is not just a creative practice or a process but rather a network of songs, styles, artists, and consumers influenced, directly or indirectly,

by the music and artists that came before: by this definition, popular music is intertextual.´ (Burns & Lacasse, 2018, p 4) For many artists, U2 included, songs are written in the studio with the assistance and guidance of sound and production technologists who bring their own personal and musical histories to the table. While it is true a band consisting of four members, their producers and other contributors, each bring their individual influences and knowledge to the creation, the stories repeated by the band members and their production team about how songs are constructed are often folkloric. In this way, the marketing of music stories is often constructed to create mystery in some instances, or provide insider knowledge in others.

Music researchers and journalists may ask an artist who their influences are and be given answers that allow non-musicians to frame the work according to their understanding of music that has come before. But as neuroscientist Daniel Levitin noted in *This is Your Brain on Music, Understanding a Human Obsession* (2006), music is embedded in the unconsciousness well before we are aware of what it is called, as humans are susceptible to musical structures and sounds from their formative months and years. The idea that music is spiritual, even divinely inspired, is not new. Academics from musicology and other social science disciplines have long sought to connect religious thought and text to popular culture, particularly popular songs, largely through the interpretation of lyrics, but also by studying the intertextual references in music performed in religious and secular settings. In U2's oeuvre the intertextual references to the Bible can be overt, directly quoting Biblical text, or hidden in layers that the casual listener might not recognise.

Two examples of U2 using the unmistakable words of the Bible are 'Jacob wrestled the angel' from ´Bullet the Blue Sky´, and 'after the flood all the colours came out', from ´Beautiful Day´ both of which are direct quotes but used in a different context so that their significance and meaning changes. In the story of Noah (Genesis 6), 'after the flood all the colours came out' was not a 'beautiful day' as it came about following the destruction of the earth, and the colours of the rainbow signified a covenant that never again would God inflict such devastation. These explicit references are also only heard as such by those familiar with the Bible. While both these examples might have the Bible as their source, as explained earlier, U2 is not an unequivocally Christian band and those unversed in Christian and Jewish texts may be unfamiliar with the origin of the references and the implication of their use.

As well as the complexity of decoding the Biblical elements of U2 and the religious frame, the parameters for the study of popular music are complex and contested, and as stated in the previous chapter, are often cross-disciplinary. The textual constituents of popular song are multifaceted and include sound, lyrics, production, live performance, vocal persona and studio and live recordings, as outlined by Allan Moore in *Song Means* (2016), and it is also common within popular music scholarship to refer to primary interviews with songwriters and band members to extrapolate information to support scholarly debate.

Meaning can be created and interrogated in a myriad of ways, including through the analysis of words as data and the deconstruction of symbolism by researchers. While traditional musicology and musical analyses primarily rely on the 'heard' aspects of songs, interpreting popular music requires consideration of multiple contextual elements: the songwriter's identity, their conscious and unconscious intentions, the effectiveness of message transmission, and the varied circumstances of reception across different audiences. To better understand how diverse religious interpretations can coexist within popular music analysis, cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model can be employed to examine how sacred texts, particularly the Hebrew Bible, may acquire multiple meanings when integrated into contemporary music. As Hall argues in *Encoding, Decoding,* ´there will be very few instances in which signs organised in a discourse signify only their literal (that is, near universally contextualised meaning´ (Hall, 2007, p 512). When applied to U2's oeuvre, Hall's paradigm illustrates how these distinct religious traditions can derive legitimate but differentiated meanings from identical lyrical and musical elements.

The encoding process manifests particular complexity when analysing scriptural references in U2's work. Although the band members predominantly approach these texts through a Christian lens, the original Hebrew texts maintain their own discrete set of cultural and religious codes that endure independently. Hall's model suggests that these disparate approaches can legitimately coexist within a single musical text, regardless of authorial intent. This theoretical framework demonstrates how musical works can sustain multiple meaningful theological readings. Hall proposes that meaning emerges not through simple transmission but through dynamic interaction between encoded messages and audiences' interpretative frameworks. Consequently, Jewish audiences may legitimately interpret biblical references through their own cultural and religious paradigms, accessing meanings embedded in Jewish traditions. This analytical process retains legitimacy regardless of the

band's conscious intentions, as the encoded scriptural references inherently carry their original Hebrew significance alongside subsequent Christian reinterpretations. The temporal dimension of biblical interpretation in U2's music further validates Hall's model. What originated as ostensibly straightforward Christian allusions in their early work has developed into more nuanced theological expressions. This evolution parallels the Jewish tradition of PaRDeS, which recognizes multiple interpretative levels from literal (peshat) to mystical (sod).

Live performance contexts introduce additional interpretative complexity as the presentation of biblical lyrics across diverse settings—from ecclesiastical spaces to political gatherings to stadium concerts—generates new meanings through the intersection of original text, artistic interpretation, and immediate context. This multilayered meaning-making process aligns with Hall's conception of cultural codes operating across multiple dimensions. Moreover, his notion of ´preferred readings´ provides a theoretical basis for understanding the historical dominance of Christian interpretations while validating alternative hermeneutical approaches. Just as Hall argues that dominant cultural institutions influence, but do not determine, meaning, the prevalence of Christian readings need not invalidate equally legitimate interpretations from other religious traditions.

In examining popular music the ‘song’ is referred to as the text, however there are many versions of songs, and it is possible for different interpretations to be applied to particular performances or recordings of the same work. In U2’s case there are single and album versions, remixes, and countless live performances of songs which may have changed over the 40 years since they were first written or recorded, therefore choosing one of these versions over another for analysis is complex. This study refers to versions included on album releases as the primary source, and other versions as supporting texts. In the context of U2 it matters, because the band often avoids making statements about what their songs ‘are’. For example, ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ is ‘not a rebel song’, but what is it? Bono has avoided defining the song itself. Listeners understand (or think they understand) the lyrics, but lyrics do not tell the whole story. The live performance of songs can, and in U2’s case often does, lead to additional meanings being inserted into the text, either lyrically through gestures and other elements such as staging, lighting and who is present on the stage. Examples of this in relation to U2 are further investigated in Chapter 6, ‘Live Performance'.

Analysing individual U2 songs can deepen the exploration of elements of composition and production and allow for a case to be built about how the different parts of the song resonate with the Hebrew Bible and its use in current and ancient times. There are connections that can be made between the Hebrew Bible and U2 through the examination of the lyrics, instrumentation, tone of voice and melody, both separately and then as they work together as a whole song. Awareness of the historical Jewish use of the Hebrew Bible allows for a deeper understanding of how U2's songs may have intended and unintended resonance with the ancient text. Applying a traditional Jewish study to understanding the meaning of the text by analysing the lyrics in individual U2 songs that explicitly quote or reference the Hebrew Bible is relatively straightforward. An example of this is ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´ which has been extensively analysed through a Christian frame. The song has an easily recognisable intro, strong chorus and affords opportunities for audience participation in live performance. However, while 'pride' is an effective hook for a song title, it highlights the complexities of interpreting individual words without context. In Jewish thought, 'pride' is undesirable, as evidenced in Leviticus 26:19: ´I will break your fierce pride´. Christian fans have incorporated ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´ into their U2-inspired ´U2charist´ services, with Debra Dean Murphy framing the song thus: ´And the "pride" spoken of in U2's iconic song is not the arrogance of the mighty, but the hope of the humble in a God whose justice is cruciform´ (Murphy, 2013, p 26).

From a Jewish perspective, in ´Pride´ there are elements of the lyrics and music that resonate with aspects of Jewish prayer, particularly congregational prayer. The main vocal theme centres on the repetition of the chorus, a style that can be associated with the Hasidic Niggun as described in Chapter 4, manifested both in the words 'in the name of love' and the wordless tune sung between verses. The text, melody and chords all contribute to what becomes a descending, then ascending melodic pattern. The humming at the end of the song has a sound reminiscent of trope cantillation drawn out over a particular style of chiming. On the *Rattle and Hum* version Bono implores the crowd, 'For Marthin Luther King now sing' encouraging singing, in an allusion to Psalm 47:4-7: ´Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises to our King, sing praises´ (*Koren Jerusalem Bible,* sefaria.org). This emphasis on communal singing was again highlighted when Bono performed the song in Las Vegas in 2023, encouraging the audience to, ´Sing for our brothers and sisters—who they themselves were singing at the Supernova Sukkot festival in Israel. We sing for those. Our people, our kind of people, music people. Playful, experimental people. Our kind of people. We sing for

them.′ This contemporary application of the song's themes demonstrates how its Biblical resonances continue to evolve through performance and reinterpretation.

Another reading suggests that ′In the name of love′ resonates with Genesis 22:9-11 and Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son to demonstrate his love of God. Rather than being a quote from the New Testament, this represents an example of intertextual 'allusion' producing a new text (hypertext) from a previous one (hypotext) as per Lacasse's framework. The line ′one man come he to justify′ has been related by scholars to Isaiah 53:11. However, as evidenced in the *Koren Jerusalem Bible* translation, the Jewish reading of Isaiah identifies the ′Righteous One′ not as an individual, but as the Jewish people collectively. Thus, the line serves not as a direct Biblical quotation but as an anchor to broader Biblical ideas, demonstrating how meaning varies according to interpretative framework. Given Bono's knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and the Psalms, his deliberate use of Biblical language patterns—′One man come′ rather than modern English—suggests conscious engagement with these textual traditions.

Multiple interpretations of U2's lyrics have emerged across their global fanbase, with distinct meanings arising from different cultural and religious perspectives. Allan Moore's analysis of ′All Along the Watchtower′ provides a valuable framework for understanding this interpretative complexity. Examining versions by Dylan, Hendrix, Havens and U2, Moore identifies shared elements of metric and harmonic structure, approximate melodic similarities, and core lyrics, while highlighting significant variations in instrumentation, tempo, tone, and production values. These divergent elements, he argues, constitute the realm of performance. U2's version on *Rattle and Hum* demonstrates explicit intertextuality through Bono's addition of the line, ′All I got is a red guitar, three chords and the truth. All I got is a red guitar, the rest is up to you.′ Moore's critical question about the import of this interpolation highlights a broader methodological concern: While identifying variations between versions is necessary, meaningful analysis must move beyond mere comparison to examine the significance of these differences. As Moore (2012, p. 16) argues, critical enquiry must progress from ′what is happening′ to ′so what?′—from description to interpretation.

In this instance, a focus on examining the ‘so what’ meaning of the intertextual quotation of the phrase, ‘three chords and the truth’, a line from an interview given by American country music songwriter Harlan Howard, who published more than 4,000 songs in his

career, leads to layers of meaning that are unlikely to have been intended by Bono when he used the line. Country music journalist Jim D'ville wrote: 'If we explore that (Harlan Howard) quote, we discover the real truth behind the structure and emotional quality of the three-chord form in country music… In his early hits, Howard primarily used the I, IV, and V chords, and usually in that order.' This is a fairly straightforward explanation, but others have ascribed their own meaning to the use of this phrase. Niall Stokes (2005, p. 83) argues that Bono's improvisation at this point of ´All Along the Watchtower´, is connected to the ´red guitar on fire´ referenced in ´Desire´, another song on *Rattle and Hum* album, whereas another intertextual approach using the Hebrew Bible as a an anchor might uncover an entirely different link by focusing perhaps on the words 'red' and 'fire'. Examining small parts of a song can lead to many different interpretations of versions of the same song by the same artists, where an invented, ambiguous meaning can be ascribed to imply a deeper connection with another event, location or type of spirituality.

This interpretative multiplicity aligns with Hall's concept of negotiated readings, where audiences may accept some elements of a dominant interpretation while adapting others to their own cultural context. In the case of U2's ´All Along the Watchtower,´ the song operates simultaneously within multiple interpretative frameworks—Dylan's original meaning, the Christian framework often applied to U2's work, and the country music tradition referenced through Howard's ´three chords and the truth.´ As Hall argues, these interpretative positions are not random or purely subjective, but operate within specific ´codes of understanding´ that are culturally determined.

Hall's discussion in 'Encoding and decoding in the television discourse' (2007) of how messages are ´systematically distorted in communication´ is particularly relevant when examining religious interpretations of U2's music. Just as Hall identifies that there is no ´purely denotative´ communication, U2's use of biblical references carries multiple layers of meaning that cannot be reduced to a single interpretation. The band's Christian background provides what Hall would term a ´dominant´ or ´preferred´ reading, but this does not preclude what he calls ´negotiated´ interpretations, such as those emerging from Jewish theological perspectives. Furthermore, Hall's emphasis on how meanings are ´structured in dominance but not closed´ helps explain how U2's music can sustain multiple valid religious readings while still maintaining coherent artistic expression. The band's use of biblical imagery creates what Hall calls ´limits and parameters´ while still allowing for what he terms

´transformations´ in meaning across different cultural and religious contexts.

An example of the artists deliberately changing the meaning of the song is ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´, which is widely taken to be a reference to the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre in Northern Ireland because of the original lyrics. In the four decades since it was released ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ has been used by U2 to highlight other conflicts when performed live through changes to the lyrics, the music, where it is located in the setlist, the accompanying images used in live performance, and how it is introduced. This reappropriation is through new or additional lyrics such as when The Edge and Bono performed the song as a duo at the Hollywood Bowl on 15 November 2011 at the 'A Decade Of Difference' concert celebrating US President Bill Clinton's charitable work and his 65th birthday. In the lyrics for ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ Bono uses 'our' and changes the words to reflect the ´troubles in the Middle East in Israel and Palestine´ (Bono, 2016):

On another broken hill,
Red crosses and a crescent moon collide
Pilgrims pray to know God's will
Scratching in the dirt, queuing up to die
Scorched earth or a cruel sun
Is this the battle Jesus won
On a Sunday Bloody Sunday

The reworked lyrics are a clear reference to the Christian cross and the Islamic crescent moon. By not explicitly naming the Jewish Star of David, the narrative suggests America and Christianity are colliding with Islam in the Middle East, avoiding assigning blame for the 'troubles' to Jews or Zionists, instead recognising that it is a clash of the two dominant religions that is the cause of conflict. The use of ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ to highlight seemingly insurmountable conflicts continued during the 2015 *iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour* when it was performed with the four band members standing on the walkway and followed by the sonic and visual representation of a bomb explosion, simulating the Dublin car bomb explosion on Friday 17 May 1974 that killed 23 people.

On 30th January 2022, Bono and The Edge shared an acoustic performance of ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ on Instagram with a new closing verse, which they said was recorded 'at

home in Dublin' to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, on 30th January 1972, when 13 protesters were shot dead by British Army soldiers in Derry, Northern Ireland. Bono starts the song by softly singing 'no more' several times and then adds the new lyrics for the final verse:

Here at the murder scene
The virus of fiction, reality TV
Why so many mothers cry
Religion is the enemy of the Holy Spirit guide
And the battle just begun
Where is the victory Jesus won?

Since it was released in 1983 ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ (*War*) has in many ways taken on a life of its own. It has variously been ascribed to other 'Bloody Sundays', and its meaning and purpose can be described through various paradigms according to the focus of the scholar studying it, and by examining the elements of its construction *and* performance in different ways. Temperley's analysis of 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' using the 'formal conventions of rock' (Temperley, 2018, p. 229) is an example of skipping the context of the intertextual reference to the Hebrew Bible and leaves significant gaps in his interpretation of the song. The 2022 version, ending with the question, ´where is the victory Jesus won?´ is a reference to the ongoing conflict (albeit much less physically violent than in 1972) in Northern Ireland and is a damning critique of the lack of progress made in achieving lasting peace in the country.

3. Methodology for this study

The overall aim of this thesis is to construct a case for how U2's music reflects Jewish thought from the Hebrew Bible. To establish this connection, I have used a number of different textual approaches which are set out within this chapter. As established in the previous chapter, the general scholarly and popular discourse about U2 is that the belief system of the members collectively is Christian, although this is not explicit, and that some of the members are more affiliated with Christianity than others. Scope is a significant issue for this study as distinctions between Christianity and Judaism and where these two religions intersect in modernity are complex and require deep theological and sociological analysis that do not fit within the parameters of this research. Rather than attempting to cover such broad

ground, the focus of the thesis is to make a direct connection between Jewish thought as it is expressed in the Hebrew text and written about by Jewish scholars, and the songs of U2.

After examining existing scholarly works, it was evident that further work needed to be undertaken to substantiate the argument that there is a significant association between the Hebrew Bible and the music of U2. This led me to form a theoretical framework focusing on the identification and examination of specific lexical elements shared between the Hebrew Bible and U2's lyrical compositions. This focus aimed to facilitate a more nuanced exploration of the Biblical references in U2's lyrics.

Recognising that the interpretation of words and their meanings constitutes a foundational element in both Biblical studies and analysis of popular music, the chosen methodology aligns with Moylan's contention that 'Bringing language to the track is an interpretation of its sounds and materials, from the listener/speaker's unique perspective—their own "subject-position".' (Moylan, 2020, p. 155). Embracing the perspective of the individual underscores the legitimacy of incorporating subjective opinions as an integral component of explaining the interconnectedness between the Hebrew Bible and U2's musical expression. This approach contributes to a scholarly discourse that transcends prior investigations, providing an understanding of the symbiotic relationship between these two realms of cultural and artistic expression.

The study of lyrics in popular music has been a subject of ongoing debate within popular music scholarship. Moylan's assertion that transcribing lyrics may present challenges due to various factors such as performance, arrangement, and linguistic nuances underscores the complexity of analysing song lyrics. ´The differences between analysing music from a score and from a record are many, though differences all tend to lead to one being perceived through sight, and the other through sound. The fundamental challenge of accurately analysing a record is to hear what is there, and to hear it accurately.´ (Moylan, 2020, p. 145) Despite these challenges, lyrics remain a crucial starting point for the analysis of popular songs, as they represent the intersection of everyday language and music, as emphasised by Allan Moore who says, 'the defining feature of popular song lies in the interaction of everyday words and music.' (Moore, 2016, p. 3). Dai Griffiths' observation that many popular songs are 'invented from babbling sounds which eventually turn into words' (Griffiths, 2003, p. 48) highlights the complex nature of songwriting and suggests that lyrics

are not static entities but dynamic expressions that may evolve without forethought or planning as to how their meaning is expressed or understood.

Pete Astor's 2010 review in *Popular Music*, ´The Poetry of Rock: Song Lyrics Are Not Poems but the Words Still Matter; Another Look at Richard Goldstein's Collection of Rock Lyrics´ frames the debate about whether lyrics are poetry and can be studied as such or need to be analysed using a different methodology. Astor notes that lyrics in pop have been the subject of attention since the 1950s, 'Taking their musical starting points in the generic themes of Tin Pan Alley songs, these writers concentrated only on words were saying, generally variations on themes of love and modern courtship'. Astor argues that from the 1960s when Goldstein first published *The Poetry of Rock* the empirical study of lyrics has broadened to embrace approaches that allow the words of songs to be deconstructed and meaning ascribed to them not just according to what words are used and how 'poetic' they are but how the words are used.

While some argue that a literary approach should be the primary methodology for lyric analysis, others, like Cheung and Feng (2021), advocate for methodologies rooted in both literature and science. Their corpus-based analysis of heavy metal song lyrics, ´Attitudinal meaning and social struggle in heavy metal song lyrics: a corpus-based analysis´ exemplifies an interdisciplinary approach that acknowledges the importance of understanding the listener and context in popular music analysis.

The case of Jean-Charles Khalifa's study on Bob Dylan's lyrics adds another layer to the discussion. Khalifa compiled lyrics from 401 songs of Bob Dylan into one document and ´ran it through a concordance program to see what would happen´ (Khalifa, 2007, p. 162) and then compared the words used by Dylan with those from the British National Corpus finding commonly used words. While linguistic methodology may not provide a complete understanding of Dylan's work, Khalifa establishes that analysing the complete lyrics of an artist to find linguistic patterns and common words is an acceptable scholarly tool, acknowledging that different methodologies may yield varied insights.

Rabbi Sacks says:

> ´In Judaism there is no one form of spirituality. There are many… Hence the special and

> distinctive feature of Judaism, that we are a community of doing rather than of thinking, understanding and feeling. There is an authoritative code of Jewish law. When it comes to halacha, the way of Jewish doing, we seek consensus. However, as Maimonides writes several times in his commentary on the Mishnah, there is no psak, no authoritative ruling, when it comes to non-halachic aspects of Judaism. We each have our own way of understanding Judaism, our own path to God.′—Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (2015-16)

Judah M. Cohen (2014, p. 37) argues that since the 1980s, scholars such as Kay Kaufman Shelemay, Mark Slobin, and Philip Vilas Bohlman effectively shifted Jewish music scholarship from seminaries to universities, applying ethnomusicological approaches to diverse Jewish communities. These studies have examined specific groups like Syrian Jews, Bukharan Jews in Queens, and the ′Radical Jewish Culture′ movement in Manhattan, revealing how sound helps construct Jewish identities and challenging monolithic definitions of ′Jewish music.′ Evan Rapport argues that over the last decades the ′gulf has widened between scholars and those outside of Jewish music research′, with academics and musicians both using mythologies ′strategically′ to interpret their own lived version of reality. He recognises the differences between mythologies and realities and his study of Bukharan Jewish weddings (2023) provides a useful case study as to how ′rethinking the past′ can be used by musicians.

In the context of this research into the connection between the Hebrew Bible and U2's music focusing on lexical elements shared between the two, Moylan's theoretical framework offers a methodological anchor. Recognising the foundational role of language in both Biblical studies and popular music analysis, Moylan's perspective supports the incorporation of subjective interpretation as a valid component in understanding the interconnectedness between these seemingly disparate realms. The distinction between literary and musicological analysis is a pertinent aspect, and Moylan's statement on the differences between analysing music from a score and from a record emphasizes the challenge of accurately analysing a record through sound rather than sight. This reinforces the notion that lyrics, though literary in nature, cannot be divorced from their sonic context, and a comprehensive musicological analysis should consider both elements.

In this study the words of songs are the primary focus as the interpretation of lyrics is a methodology used by the majority of scholars writing about U2. Analysis of the lyrics and

their use is an effective tool to tease out the nuances of the textual relationship in U2's canon to the Hebrew Bible. As has been outlined in the previous chapter, the use of music of the Hebrew Bible is not easily identifiable, largely because it relies on tenuous archaeological evidence, but there are ways that the words that are used in Jewish prayer resonate with the combination of melody and Biblically-inspired lyrics in many of U2's songs.

The first four of U2's eras feature three studio albums, which are identified by the time of their release and the general sound production techniques employed. The first era, *Boy/October/War/ Under A Blood Red Sky* (1980–1983) and the second *Unforgettable Fire/Joshua Tree/Rattle and Hum* (1984–1988) are observed as having the most obvious references to the divine, however by analysing specific words within their context and taking note of how the songs are staged in live performance and video it is apparent that the influence of the Bible extends well into the third era, *Achtung Baby/Zooropa/Pop* (1991–1997) and beyond.

4. Data collection and sources for this study:

a) Quantitative data

After writing the literature review and identifying different methodologies and gaps in the academic writing about U2 and the Hebrew Bible, the next step was to identify and investigate certain words and phrases that appear in both texts. U2's lyrics are available on the band's official website, U2.com, which for the purposes of this study has been used as the primary source to collate, tabulate and examine approximately 200 original U2 songs into one document. This method provides a pool of quantitative data that I used to classify and closely examine keywords and phrases to determine the symbolic and textual references consistent with the Hebrew Bible, as demonstrated later in this chapter. Following the initial analysis of the lyrics, I undertook a brief scan of some readily available published interviews with band members to determine their views about the intended meaning of particular songs and how these meanings are achieved through the use of words, music and production.

b) Published interviews

The autobiographical *U2 by U2* (2006), written with Neil McCormack; Bono's memoir

Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story (2022); and interviews with band members, including material archived on U2.com, provide primary source material for this research. While these sources, particularly Bono's memoir, explicitly document instances where biblical text has been incorporated into U2's lyrics and explain the reasoning behind such choices, Bono himself acknowledges these explanations are not definitive. This openness to multiple interpretations aligns with this thesis's methodological approach, which draws from Jewish methods of Biblical interpretation to identify multiple possible meanings, enabling a more nuanced analysis of the lyrics in the context of both song and performance.[4]

c) Identifying common words in U2's lyrics and the Bible

After undertaking this survey of the broad themes of U2's lyrics by sorting them through the word cloud generator which highlights the most used words and phrases from inputted text, it was then possible to identify key song words that are suggestive of Biblical language. There are a finite number of Hebrew words used in the Bible which limits the number of recognisable words that will appear in both the Tanakh and U2's lyrics. The examination started with a further narrowing of the analysis of the lyrics identifying four regularly used words, 'soul', 'freedom', 'spirit' and 'knee', that are repeated in both the Hebrew Bible and U2's lyrics and serve as significant signposts in storytelling.

d) Jewish Biblical textual analysis

In Chapter 4 I further discuss the traditional Jewish methods of analysing Biblical text and their relevance to the study of popular song. Biblical text can be examined by using the following approaches and methods from the Jewish tradition: the plain (simple) or literal reading (known in Hebrew as 'peshat'); the allegorical reading through text's hint or allusion eg gematria ('remez'); the deeper meaning of the verse ('derash'); the secret meaning ('sod'). (Chabad.org 'How is the Torah Interpreted'). The Jewish approach presupposes an acceptance of the text (the Bible) as truth, and seeks to understand it through the paradigm of

[4] I submitted formal interview requests to U2's management team during my research. Despite establishing initial contact with members of their organization prior to commencing my doctoral studies, including their spiritual advisor (whose identity remains confidential per agreement), the COVID-19 pandemic significantly limited opportunities for in-person research. Following the pandemic, my research had progressed substantially along alternative analytical frameworks, making direct interviews less central to my methodology than initially planned. Although I maintained contact with their management, the band members were unavailable for interviews at the time of thesis completion.

human experience, understanding, and the mysteries of the mind and soul.

5. Conclusion

This methodology integrates three analytical approaches to address a gap in U2 scholarship. By combining Jewish biblical interpretation methods (PaRDeS), quantitative lyrical analysis, and Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding framework, the study provides both empirical foundation and theoretical justification for examining U2's biblical references beyond the dominant Christian interpretative lens. The quantitative component involves systematic analysis of approximately 200 U2 songs to identify recurring biblical terminology, establishing patterns of Hebrew biblical influence that have not been previously documented. This lexical mapping of words such as 'soul,' 'freedom,' 'spirit,' and 'knee' creates empirical grounding for interpretative claims while revealing the extent of biblical language throughout U2's career.

The application of traditional Jewish hermeneutical methods aligns with the ambiguous nature of U2's lyrics and the band's own resistance to definitive interpretations of their songs. U2 may encourage the identification of scriptural references in their work through hints and allusion in video and live performance, however, this is rarely done explicitly. Embracing this ambiguity and acknowledging that the interpretation of popular music draws on aspects of other multidisciplinary academic theories invites analysis through multiple paradigms. Stuart Hall's model provides theoretical scaffolding by demonstrating how meaning emerges through interaction between encoded messages and audiences' interpretative frameworks, validating multiple simultaneous readings of biblical references without requiring adherence to any single denominational perspective.

By centering the listener's interpretative authority, this methodology challenges the exclusionary effects of scholarship that privileges Christian readings. This approach encourages a greater understanding of the intended and unintended meaning of U2's songs, validating how different religious communities can authentically engage with the same musical material through their own spiritual vocabularies and traditions. This framework offers a model for examining religiously inflected popular music that honours diverse audience experiences, revealing how U2's work creates space for multiple faith traditions across diverse cultural and religious contexts.

CHAPTER 3: The Hebrew Bible in U2's work

1. About U2

The presence of the Hebrew Bible is constant throughout U2's oeuvre and is examined in this chapter by broadly referencing the origin, context and Biblical expression present on each U2 album. Identifying specific instances of the Hebrew Bible in U2's work highlights where a Jewish perspective can add nuance to existing scholarly interpretation and proposes new ways of reading the text, suggesting a subjective explication can follow the belief system of the listener and uncover meaning that might not have been 'heard' or understood by others, including the songwriters themselves. As Allan Moore says: 'As a listener, you participate fundamentally in the meanings that songs have. As a listener, you're not fed these meanings on a plate, and if someone (particularly someone in a position of power, a music journalist, a musician, a teacher or parent) insists a song's meaning is such and such, you have every right to disagree (yes, even with the musicians who wrote and sang the song).' (Moore, 2016, pg 1) If the meaning of a lyric is true to one person or a minority it should be no less legitimate than the analysis and understanding of the majority.

The prevalent discourse in scholarship about U2 is focused on the overt and implied presence of Christianity in their work. As Scott Calhoun writes in the introduction to *U2 and the Religious Impulse: Take Me Higher*, much has been published about the connection between U2 and Christianity, including the ´Christian influences on U2 in its formative years and Christian themes in the U2 songbook´ (Calhoun, 2018, p. 2). However, little has been written about the Jewish influences, and while Bono cites the Psalms as a major inspiration, the connection to these Hebrew texts has primarily been explored by Christian scholars who view these through the filter of their faith and Christian understanding of the Bible. ´Much of the confusion around U2's faith stems from the fact that they've never been an "officially" Christian rock band´ (Rothman, 2014, p 4). Despite Bono having often declared in lyrics and interviews that he is not a proponent of organised religion; his use of religious texts appears at odds with this claim. The Psalms and the Hebrew Bible only exist for and because of religion, and although they contain the word of God, the way the words are used in modern society is to frame and underpin religious teachings.

U2 was formed by four teenage boys who attended the non-denominational Mount Temple Comprehensive School in Dublin, Ireland. The school's pluralistic environment allowed the four, from different backgrounds and parts of Dublin, to come together in a way that was uncommon in that time when division on religious and political grounds was the norm in Ireland. The band began when Larry Mullen Jnr, a budding drummer, posted a note on a school noticeboard for anyone who wanted to join a band (Bono et al, 2006, p. 34). His parents were supportive of his pursuit and the first band meeting was held in their kitchen. Through a couple of iterations in the first year as Feedback and then the Hype, the group was whittled down from five members to four: guitarist Dave Evans, singer Paul Hewson, drummer Larry and bass player Adam Clayton. Dave Evans became The Edge, and Paul Hewson was recast as Bono. Their imagination and creativity was evident even then, as was the influence of Christianity on three of the members (Greco, 2019, pp. 11-12).

Lead singer Bono had accompanied his mother to Protestant church services rather than attend Catholic services with his father. The patterns of music that are etched into the human brain from an early age through repeated exposure, would likely have come from Bono's mother's Church and his father's love of opera. Bono also spent a lot of time with his best friend, Guggi's family, the Rowans, who were a type of 'evangelical' Christian. Two years into the life of the band, Bono, the Edge and Larry joined a prayer group called Shalom, described by Bono as a Christian commune (Bono, 2022, p. 139). Their faith and commitment to a life of devotion were soon called into question by the group leader who suggested they should forgo music-making and dedicate themselves to a completely Christian lifestyle. This was one of the many potential tension points between the personal beliefs of the members of U2 and their rock and roll careers. Joshua Rothman in his 2014 essay for *The New Yorker* notes, ´Their break with organized religion was probably inevitable. But it was still traumatic, which is perhaps why almost every U2 album contains a song about their decision to belong to a band rather than a church.´

In 1980 U2 released their first album, *Boy,* and by 1981 they left Shalom and released their second album, *October*. Reviewing *October* in Irish Music magazine *Hot Press*, Neil McCormick, (who in 2006 co-authored *U2 by U2* with the band) said, ´It is a Christian LP that avoids the pedantic puritanism associated with much Christian rock, avoids the old world emotional fascism of organised religion.´ More 'new wave' than punk, U2 had a fair amount in common with bands who also emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s such as so-called

New Romantics Duran Duran, Spandau Ballet and Simple Minds who were interested in a pop aesthetic more than being rock stars and were not identifiably punk like the Sex Pistols or the Ramones.

U2 and their peers were post-punk only in the sense that they emerged not from the punk movement, but *because* of it, almost after it had run its course. In interviews and academic studies the influence of punk music has often been referred to as one of the most important creative influences on U2. Unlike their New Romantic musical peers, U2 were not ´art school types´ into puffy shirts, coloured hair and fashion. In *U2: Three Chords and the Truth* Niall Stokes quotes Neil McCormick, co-author of U2's official biography *U2 by U2* (2006) who dismisses Eamon Dunphy's labelling of Bono as a 'punk'. McCormick says: ´Bono and his band became part of a new wave, but Dunphy doesn't understand this distinction because he doesn't understand punk… treating it as a political movement instead of a sporadic and spontaneous musical phenomenon´ (Stokes, 1990, p. 101).

The members of U2 all had exposure to religion and music, influenced by their families and their peers. The Edge's older brother, Dick, who later became a member of the Virgin Prunes, was one of the original members of the band put together in the Mullen family home which became U2. As detailed in *U2 by U2,* The Edge and Mullen Jnr also came from families that were observant of religion and spent time in church and communal music groups. Mullen Jnr had been chasing a career as a drummer since he was 14 and had joined a marching band, while The Edge and Dick were building their own guitars well before they joined Larry Mullen's kitchen band. Adam Clayton owned a guitar, although it is often reported that he did not know how to play it. U2 had an energy about them and from the beginning, and once they separated from Shalom, they were fully focused on the craft of music making.

Bono initially wrote songs in his bedroom in suburban Dublin, as depicted on the stage of the *iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour*, but after the release of the *Boy* album U2 wrote in the recording studio. The change to writing in the studio had an impact on the composition and style of their songs as the music and lyrics were often completed at the last minute and under time pressure, with lyrics drawn from immediate experiences. In a 1986 interview, The Edge told Tony Bacon, ´Sometimes we write in soundchecks, sometimes we work together in a room, oftentimes I might come in with a piece of music. Generally, though, it always

finishes in the same way, with all of us in the same room, bashing it out, which I think is what creates the unique qualities of the band—the fact that there's four people pulling and pushing at this piece to put it into some sort of shape.′ There are a number of identifiable and enduring themes inspired by Bono's personal life including the loss of his mother at age 14, and marriage to his childhood sweetheart, Alison Stewart.

Lyrically the band was also influenced by the social and political environment of its formative years. The Irish 'Troubles', the food and water crisis in Africa, and a studious focus on the Bible. According to Bono in the autobiographical *U2 by U*2 (2006) his use of Psalm 40 was not planned, the Psalm just came to mind when he was looking for a lyric when studio time was running out. ′40′ has become one of U2's most enduring live songs and is a popular show closer. In the 1980s U2 played ′40′ at more than 300 live shows, with millions of people leaving stadiums singing the lyrics, firming the impression of U2 as a 'Christian' band even though that wasn't the specific intention of the group. John Waters in *Race of Angels* reports The Edge saying ′We felt very uncomfortable about people hearing the music and listening to it with this idea in their head—that this was a band of Christians. Christian soldiers. We really did not want that to be the first thing on their minds′ (Waters, 1994, p 161) Yet the band continued to incorporate Biblical imagery often associated with Christianity into their work.

Bono corresponded with journalist Stuart Bailie in February 2018 saying that he had a ′long-term obsession′ with trying to understand why one person would take the life of another, and revealed, ′I realised that this was an obsession that started early in my life when the Troubles made themselves known to me personally.′ Bono recalled that his first encounter with sectarian violence was seeing ′violent gangs′ (Bailie, 2019, p. 242) clash at a holiday camp, but it was the coordinated bomb attack in Dublin in 1974 that killed 33 people that left a profound mark on Bono and his friends, one of whom, Andy Rowan, had witnessed a car bomb explode. Rowan, who turned to drugs as a result of the trauma, was the inspiration for ′Bad′ (*The Unforgettable Fire*, 1984) and 30 years later ′Raised By Wolves′ (*Songs of Innocence*, 2014): 'Blood in the house, Blood on the street, The worst things in the world, Are justified by belief'. Stuart Bailie goes further in unpacking the influence of the Troubles and Irish nationalism on U2, asking Bono if in 1975 he was aware of the Miami Showband killings. Bono noted, 'The Miami Showband massacre was actually the first terror attack on music in our times' (Bailie, 2018, p. 243). In his memoir, *Surrender* Bono makes

note of how impactful the killing of these musicians was on him.

This obsession turned into U2's mission to connect with humanity and has manifested in many incarnations, from promoting Amnesty International to spearheading Music Rising and the ONE campaign. The mission, collectively and individually, has been about fairness, social justice and equity. Bono's personal activism took on a life of its own with the Jubilee 2000 campaign, Make Poverty History, and the foundation of ONE. In *Surrender,* Bono writes that he learnt that Jubilee was a ′biblical concept′ described by the Jewish prophet Isaiah (Bono, 2022, p. 356). This turn in Bono's life also had a great impact on the band, both in how they recorded (including the lyrics and collaborators) and their live performance. *Christianity Today* reported on the National Prayer Breakfast on 2 February, 2006, with an audience of more than 3,000: 'Two passages drive his message, Bono says: the call in Leviticus 25 for a Year of Jubilee and debt forgiveness, and the command in Isaiah 58 to share with the hungry and provide for the poor'. Reported in a mainstream Christian publication that has covered U2 over its lifespan, it does not mention these are Jewish texts and Bono's inspiration is Judaism. In *Surrender* Bono writes that he is suspicious of the idea of 'oneness' and the 'Homogeneity of the human experience'. This thought is reflected in the lyrics of ′One′—'We are one, but we are not the same', (Bono, 2022, p. 268) essentially a Kabbalistic thought as expressed by Rabbi Aron Moss of Nefesh Synagogue in Sydney 'For the unity of humankind we need one G-d (sic); but for G-d's unity to be complete we need human diversity' (Moss, chabad.org).

Music is known to be deeply personal, thus if an evangelical Christian wants to claim a connection to U2 they will hear and understand its music through their own paradigm. The difference in the place of the listener has had a lasting impact on how U2 are perceived. In the 'Bible Belt' of the USA it was seen as being intently Christian, a hangover from the first time it toured there when Bono, The Edge and Larry Mullen were wrestling with the weight of their own religious commitment. Bono has not shied away from publicly declaring his faith, while simultaneously rejecting organised religion. In an interview with Gay Byrne for Late Late Show, aired on RTE Ireland on June 25th, 2013, Bono said, 'The person Christ is my way to understand God. I pray to Christ… I pray to understand the will of God' but also ′Religion is the enemy of God… I look to the scriptures for poetic truth as well as the historical stuff′.

In a paper presented, at U2: The Hype and the Feedback, a Conference Exploring the Music, Work, and Influence of U2, October 3, 2009 at North Carolina Central University, Durham, NC, John A. Ballard and Anjelika Gasilina argued that many have called U2 a Christian rock band without explicitly using the 'Christian Rock' label. They note that among the accolades Granger (2001) asserts ´both *October* and *The Joshua Tree* have been listed by some Christian music aficionados as being among the 100 greatest Christian albums of all time´. However, I suggest that since their first two albums, U2 has sought less to communicate with Christian fans, whether covertly or explicitly, and instead have aimed to amplify the messages and philosophy contained in the Bible to *all* listeners, Christian or otherwise; and that much of that Biblical content is, in fact, from the Hebrew Bible and can (and should) be framed through a Jewish perspective.

2. The Hebrew Bible in each U2 era

There is evidence of intentional use of the Hebrew Bible on every U2 album, however this is not uncommon in popular culture as biblical references are everywhere and are explicit and implicit in all forms of creative expression including artworks, theatre, books and popular music.

As outlined in the Introduction, there are five identifiable eras of U2's expansive career. In this chapter, I am adding a Jewish perspective to existing interpretations of U2's albums, suggesting Judaic Biblical meanings and associations that might add to a broader understanding of why U2's work has resonance with the Hebrew Bible in each of the eras defined earlier. As established in the earlier outline of the methodology, I am primarily focusing on lyrics, but not just as they are on the page, as they are delivered, the context and persona of the singer and the instrumentation. This draws a connection between the historical usage of the Psalms in particular and the Biblical style of words and song composition. There is a long tradition in Western music of quoting the Bible, with the Psalms being regularly incorporated into religious and secular performances, from Hildegard of Bingen to Stravinsky. This Biblical intertextuality began with the Jewish exile from Jerusalem after the destruction of the Second Temple by the Babylonians, when exile and displacement forced the Jewish ritual prayer and sacrificial services to change.

There are significant Christian influences on U2 and popular culture generally, but many of these have their roots in Judaism and their analysis in accordance with a Jewish approach have not previously been explored. In this chapter, I document each U2 album to give a broad historical overview and context to U2's references to the Hebrew Bible. Allan Moore in *Song Means* states, ´To analyse a popular song is, of its very nature, to offer an interpretation of it, to determine what range of meaning it has, to make sense of it. Such determination, such making, is an after-the-event operation… While listening, we are simply experiencing the song´ (Moore, 2016, p. 22). Bono stated in his interview with Phil Sutcliffe in 1991 that his intention was to use images to tell stories rather than ascribing only one meaning to the songs, giving permission for the songs to mean whatever the listener wants them to mean. The sonic influences and expressions change but the Biblical themes and references are a constant.

3. Exploring ERA 1—*Boy*/*October*/*War*/*Under A Blood Red Sky*

Boy **(1980)**

With the fervour of youth and while three of the members were deeply engaged in studying the Bible with their Christian fellowship, Shalom, U2 wrote and released their first album, *Boy*. The textual elements of the opening track, ´I Will Follow´ are full of lyrical angst and vocal passion, one of the first instruments heard is the glockenspiel, an instrument associated with child's play, creating a familiar and innocent sensibility. Bono has stated 'the songs are autobiographical' (Stokes, 2005, p. 8), and as such, they are relatable to the teenage listener with simple bass, punk-inspired vocals, and lyrics that run the gamut of emotion, strongly influenced by pent up loss and longing tied to the sudden death of Bono's mother in September 1974, when Bono was 14 years old. Bono says the repetition and percussion of the chorus chant and lyric: 'if you walk away, walk away / I walk away, walk away / I Will Follow' in this song is a 'mantra' (Bono, 2022, p. 73). In this context the 'I' is a boy who wants to follow his mother, even if it is to the grave. The phrase 'I will follow' is loaded with symbolic meaning connecting to the Biblical story of Ruth,[5] following her adopted mother, Naomi, showing her commitment to faith and community, or as Bono says 'eternal love'

[5] וַתֹּאמֶר רוּת אַל־תִּפְגְּעִי־בִי לְעָזְבֵךְ לָשׁוּב מֵאַחֲרָיִךְ כִּי אֶל־אֲשֶׁר תֵּלְכִי אֵלֵךְ וּבַאֲשֶׁר תָּלִינִי אָלִין עַמֵּךְ עַמִּי וֵאלֹהַיִךְ אֱלֹהָי׃
Ruth 1: 16 ´But Ruth replied, "Do not urge me to leave you, to turn back and not follow you. For wherever you go, I will go; wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

(Bono, 2022, p. 73). Another reading of ´I Will Follow´ connects to the concept of forgiveness which is introduced in the Hebrew Bible in the story of Joseph who forgives his brothers after they 'walk away' leaving him to die in a deep pit. (Genesis 44:18–47:27).

The 'spirituality' of the *Boy* album has been referenced by Greco in *The Rosary and the Microphone* (Greco, 2019, p. 21), Neufeld in *U2: Rock n Roll to Change the World* and others, with the vast majority of scholars describing this spirituality as being Christian because of the band´s known connection with a Christian preacher and the prayer group, Shalom. While these scholars frame the album as mostly containing 'implicit' references to Christianity, many of these ideas and references have their foundation in Jewish thought and text. The spiritual resonance of the *Boy* album is not because of the way the songs were written or by whom, but how it was heard, as listeners connect with the yearning, the tones and the ambiguity of meaning. These resonances are not just in ´I Will Follow´, but also ´Twilight´, in the use of poignant lyrics such as 'in the shadows boy meets man' and ´Into the Heart´, where the glockenspiel makes another appearance. On certain tracks, the vocal has a punk aesthetic, for example on ´11'O Clock Tick Tock´ with Bono's anguished delivery of the line, 'I hear the children crying', accompanied by The Edge's guitar effects created using the now signature Memory Man delay pedal. The lyrics are born of improvisation (Stokes, 2005, p. 13) but their meaning is no less important because of that, with simple repeated refrains accentuating the instrumental sounds.

October **(1981)**

The follow-up album *October*, produced by Steve Lillywhite who also produced U2's debut album *Boy*, was released in 1981 and is considered by scholars such as Tim Neufeld to be more overtly Christian than the first album. There are explicit examples of biblical reference in the lyrics, and much of the analysis of the album by mainstream secular media noted its connection to religious texts. *October* opens with the single ´Gloria´, a name that is significant in the modern music canon, with Irish singer/songwriter Van Morrison's ´Gloria´ (originally performed by the Them) famously covered by Patti Smith and The Doors and appearing in U2's live set over time, marking both a connection and a delineation with U2's song. In placing their own ´Gloria´ as the opening track for *October,* U2 establishes an expectation for a more exuberant, uplifting and mature record than *Boy*. The use of Latin phrase, 'in te domine' implies a connection to religion because Latin is only used in Catholic

Church services, however there was little controversy about U2's use of Latin at the time of its release even though it could have been seen as a direct association with Catholicism in the Irish sectarian divide.

Timothy Koozin argues ´U2's "Gloria" overtly navigates the liminality between sensual and religious expression, providing an early prototype for later U2 songs that will do this including "Mysterious Ways" (1991) and "American Soul" (2017). Intersections of the spiritual and the sensual in the lyrics correlate with contrasts in sonic spatiality, vocal quality, and guitar technique, creating a dynamic virtual space that can imply both the grandeur of a vast sonic landscape and the intimacy of personal space… The protagonist in the song seems to be singing to a woman in a spiritual way while also perhaps singing to God in a sensual way´ (Koozin, 2022, pp 165–166). ´Gloria´ expresses a passion and reverence that is universally heard as spiritual, not because of the lyrics but the combination of vocal tone, cathartic guitar, sparse piano that creates a soothing undertone and a consistent rhythm section providing an unshakeable backbone and unwavering commitment to the cause.

Galbraith says, '(While) under the fundamentalist influence of the Shalom Fellowship, U2's lyrics continued to evidence an essentially apocalyptic worldview throughout the ensuing decades, with the spiritual battle lines becoming more nuanced and interiorized. This is even evident in "Fire," the very song that U2 was recording at the time McGuinness challenged them to hurry it up. The song is filled with end-times apocalyptic imagery culled from Revelation 6:12–13, which describes the sun turning black, the moon turning red, and stars falling from the sky' (Galbraith, 2012, p. 190). The storytelling style of ´I Fall Down´, ´Rejoice´ and the lyrical poetry of the title track, ´October´, are interrupted by the jarring, muddied production of the track, ´I Threw A Brick Through A Window´ with the lyrics: 'No one is blinder than he who will not see', which in its phrasing and etymology has a biblical resonance.

´Rejoice´ includes the lyric: 'I can't change the world but I can change the world in me', a phrase that reappears throughout the band's repertoire over the next four decades. Bono reworks the line in live performances and on the *Songs of Innocence* bonus track ´Lucifer's Hands´ when he sings, 'Yes I can change the world but I can't change the world in me'. While it might be said that Bono has changed the world through his activism, particularly with the organisations ONE and (RED), the idea of changing the world through thoughts and

deeds is known in Judaism as Tikkun Olam or ‘healing the world’ (’tikkun’ meaning ‘repair’ and ‘olam’ meaning ‘the world’).

Similarly, the idea of the ´Stranger in A Strange Land´, (‘Stranger, in a strange land he looked at me like I was the one who should run’) has roots in the Hebrew Bible: ‘Do not ill-treat a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in Egypt’ (Exodus 20:22) and ‘Do not oppress a stranger; you yourselves know how it feels to be a stranger [literally, ´you know the soul of a stranger´], because you were strangers in Egypt’ (Exodus 23:9). The stranger in U2’s song has the faith to know that he should not be afraid. ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´ is another example of how Bono used the Hebrew Bible as inspiration for his lyrics during this period and is a song examined more closely in Chapter 4. As Bono said in the Sutcliffe interview he ‘hates’ religion but believes in God ‘very strongly’. The lyrics of ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´ evoke images of sectarian violence: the spilling of blood at the foot of Mount Zion in Biblical Israel compares with the Troubles in Northern Ireland which was the prevailing narrative in Ireland at the time *October* was written (See Chapter 5).

The lyrics to the downtempo ´Scarlet´ are simply a drawn-out meditative repetition of the word ‘rejoice’, in the key of D Major, in a style that is found on the 1987 single, ´With Or Without You´ (*The Joshua Tree*).

אֶשְׂמְחָה וְאֶעֱלְצָה בֶּךָ אֲזַמְּרָה שִׁמְךָ עֶלְיוֹן׃
I will rejoice and exult in You,
singing a hymn to Your name, O Most High. (JPS, 198)

When U2 performed ´Scarlet´ at the Melbourne 360° show in December 2010, to celebrate the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, Bono said ´We rejoice´ as part of a monologue highlighting the political prisoners still incarcerated in Myanmar. He ended by saying ´We are free… rejoice´. He sang, ´Rejoice´ with the audience taking up the refrain and singing ´Rejoice´ several times after him, following the tune of the song, in a solemn worshipful expression of gratitude.

War (1983)

The most explicit textual use of the Hebrew Bible by U2 is ´40´ the closing track of their

third album, *War,* which uses a direct quote from Psalm 40: ´I waited patiently for the Lord / He inclined and heard my cry / He lifts me up out of the pit / Out of the miry clay´. In 1999, Bono said of the Psalms: ´A lot of the Psalms feel like to me, the blues ... Words and music did for me what solid religious argument could never do, they introduced me to God, not belief in God, more an experiential sense of GOD. As a result the Book of Psalms always felt open to me and led me to the poetry of Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon…´ (*Sunday Herald,* 1999, Glasgow). The fourth track on the album, ´Like A Song´ also uses the structure of the Psalms with Biblical sentiment and follows the uplifting sound and melody of 'I Will Follow' and 'Gloria'. The title of the track alludes to the Psalms and King Solomon's ´Song of Songs´.

Veering away from the esoteric tones and Celtic-inspired instrumentation U2 had previously favoured, there are more rock-style songs on *War* than on the first two albums, with three solid singles: ´New Year's Day´, ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ and ´Two Hearts Beat As One´. *War* entered the British charts at number one and spent 180 days on the Billboard album charts, peaking at number 12, while 'New Year's Day' reached number 2 on Billboard's US Mainstream Rock Chart. The album saw U2 consciously move away from the reflective storytelling masked in traditional Irish sounds and the oblique Biblical references evident on *Boy* and *October*, to strong, forceful messaging and direct calls to action. The refrain in ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´, 'How long must we sing this song' is echoed in the closing track '40', evidencing an incorporation of the words of Psalm 40 woven throughout the album. The thread can also be found in the album track, ´Like A Song´, with the lyrics 'Like a song I have to sing, I sing it for you / Like the words I have to bring / I bring it for you.' Relating to the Biblical significance of song is a theme revisited in U2's later work with ´Song For Someone´ (*Songs of Innocence*).

On *War*, ´Like A Song´ is followed by the track ´Drowning Man´ which starts softly and builds gradually, with a return to the yearning vocal heard on the *Boy* and *October* albums. 'Hold on and don't let go of my love/ the storms will pass/ it won't be long now/ this love will last forever'. The phrasing and language again evoke biblical imagery, coupled with lyre-like guitar strumming and violin, played by Steve Wickham who later joined the Waterboys. Several U2 fan sites and Andrew Zack Lewis in 'Stravinsky and U2 fix Psalm 40' refer to the lyrics of ´Drowning Man´ containing explicit verses from Isaiah 40:31: ´But those who put their hope in the Lord shall renew [their] vigour, they shall raise wings as

eagles; they shall run and not weary´. *War* is the first of U2's albums to also explicitly reference the world outside of Ireland and the UK with a focus on the USA as evidenced by the song ´The Refugee´ which features what can be referred to as war-like chanting of 'woah woah' punctuating the narrative of the USA as the 'promised land', a biblical ideology framed by the European colonists who settled in America.

***Under A Blood Red Sky* (1983)**

Partly recorded on 5th June 1983 at Red Rocks amphitheatre in Denver Colorado, USA during the War Tour, *Under A Blood Red Sky* (*UABRS*) is generally understood to be the concluding note in the first era of U2's journey. *UABRS* is a 'live' album and contains no material that had not been previously released and is technically the only live album U2 has ever released commercially, although there have been video and DVD concert releases since. With *UABRS*, U2 were following the path of their slightly older punk and new wave heroes´ live albums: Joy Division's 1981 live and outtake album *Still*, The Clash's 1981 unofficial bootleg at *Live at Bonds International Casino,* and the Ramones´ 1978 album *It's Alive*. Despite the title and the video recording, the version presented as the *UABRS* album was not of a concert at Red Rocks in Denver, Colorado, but was a curated compilation of live performances from shows at Red Rocks, Boston, USA and in Germany.

As a marketing tool *UABRS* was highly effective, showcasing the strength of U2 as a live band, and containing key moments that defined U2 in a way that the studio albums were not able to. Bono breathlessly sings the line from 'Gloria', 'give it to you', physically and metaphorically punching the air. In another context 'give it to you' could be sexually loaded, but in 1985 the band and the audience were clearly on a different plane, with video footage showing the crowd in the frenzy of a shared quasi-religious experience chanting 'go, go, go' repeatedly in response to the singer. ´Gloria´ segues into ´11 O'Clock Tick Tock´ with the lyric, 'Call out your name', innocuous but repeated, and full of pain and longing, invoking King David calling out to God in the Psalms. In the video version Bono waves the white flag while singing ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´, a song that will stay in U2's set for 40 years. ´The Electric Co´ is full of guitar hero moments, Bono's pained singing of the lyric 'if you don't know' jarring against the frenzied clash of drums and guitars but is grounded by the steady bass.

The live rendition of ´New Year's Day´ by U2, marked by Bono's operatic delivery and The Edge's haunting backup vocal, transcends the conventional punk rock aesthetic, incorporating elements that lend the performance a profound and emotive quality. The pivotal line, ´I will be with you again´ resonates with a poignant blend of yearning for the past and a prophetic vision of a unified future. This lyrical expression finds resonance in the context of the Hebrew Bible, particularly in the Book of Exodus. The parallel drawn between, ´I will be with you again´ and the Exodus narrative is discernible in Exodus 3:16, where God, speaking to Moses, declares, ´I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you.´ The divine assurance of God's presence during the liberation of the Jewish people from Egypt aligns with the thematic essence of ´New Year's Day´. The anticipation of being with the people again, signifying freedom and the fulfilment of a promise, echoes the prophetic undertones in the biblical passage.

The use of the divine name ‘Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh’ in the biblical context, signifying ‘I Am’ or ‘I Will Be’, parallels the lyrical articulation of being with others again. The lyrics of ´New Year's Day´, particularly the line ´we can break through, though torn in two, we can be one,´ resonates as a collective call for freedom and unity. This sentiment is reminiscent of the Exodus narrative, where the Jewish people sought liberation from bondage. The desire to overcome division and attain a sense of oneness aligns with the biblical theme of deliverance, mirroring the collective journey of the Israelites toward freedom and a shared destiny. In essence, ´New Year's Day´ acquires a deeper resonance with Judaism and the Hebrew Bible through its thematic alignment with the Exodus narrative, offering a contemplative exploration of the yearning for freedom, the promise of divine presence, and the collective aspiration for unity and belonging.

The version of ´11 O’Clock Tick Tock´ on *UABRS* was not from the Red Rocks performance but was recorded at the Orpheum Theatre, Boston, Massachusetts on May 6, 1983, and originally used as a promotional release for a radio play. By the time of the Boston and Red Rocks performances Bono had stopped trying to be punk and was fully embracing his ability to sing, adding lyrics and encouraging audience participation, both physical and vocal, with the Edge harmonising to add richness to the sound. On the original pressing of *UABRS* Bono sings, ´I love the crowd, lift it up´, however this was edited out of later pressings because of copyright issues with his use of ´Send in the Clowns´, the Stephen Sondheim song which was commonly known to U2’s generation as a popular music chart

topper for singers Judy Collins and Frank Sinatra. This ‘Lift it up, lift me up, lift us up’ has become a hallmark phrase in U2’s live performances and as they have matured and Bono has arguably become more overtly spiritual in his use of the term, his intention to ‘lift’ and ‘be lifted’ is a sentiment that he returns to again and again.

The narrative built by U2 over their first three albums is exemplified by the use of ′40′ to close *UABRS*. First used as the closing track for *War,* ′40′ had by this stage become one of the most transcendent points of the U2 live show. A psalm, sung by a rock band, that resonated with both the religious and secular concertgoers, saw millions of people echoing the Biblical refrain ‘how long to sing this song’ as they left a U2 concert. How many fans even recognised that the words were written 3,000 years ago? What the version of ′40′ on *UABRS* did was capture the moment when the audience carried the words and finished the concert on their own terms. The moment when the band U2 belonged to all of them.

4. Exploring ERA 2—*The Unforgettable Fire*/*The Joshua Tree*/*Rattle and Hum*

The Unforgettable Fire **(1984)**

The lyrics for the title track, ′The Unforgettable Fire′ are phrased in Biblical tense and use descriptive language to create a sense of ancient times, suggesting a veiled connection to Joshua 6:1–6:10 and the fall of Jericho, which is a recurring motif in earlier U2 songs including the single ′A Celebration′, particularly Joshua 6:5 when God said, ′When you hear the sound of the shofar, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat′. The tragedy is recast in ′The Unforgettable Fire′ in the similarly expressed lyric:

The city walls are all come down
The dust a smoke screen all around
See faces ploughed like fields that once
Gave no resistance.

And we live by the side of the road
On the side of a hill as the valleys explode

Dislocated, suffocated
The land grows weary of its own.

Niall Stokes in *Into the Heart* notes that at this time Bono had been reading Paul Celan ´Celan, in particular opened up new avenues of spiritual doubt´ (Stokes, 2005, p. 51). Celan was a Jewish Romanian-born Holocaust survivor who composed and published poetry in German language including the poem, ´Todesfuge´ (´Death Fugue´), a graphic depiction of life in a concentration camp. It is said that Bono became ´fixated´ on the line from Celan's ´Meridian´ speech, ´Poetry is a sort of homecoming´ and this contributed to the poetic style he used to craft the lyrics for the *Unforgettable Fire* (Naddaff-Hafrey, 2012). There is a subtle undercurrent of conflict contained within the lyrics and the sounds, as U2 had been touring America and Europe, learning about history, culture and music and the *Unforgettable Fire* was a result of that lived experience.

The *Unforgettable Fire* was the band's fourth studio album, recorded in Ireland at Slane Castle in County Meath and Windmill Lane in Dublin. This album, U2's first collaboration with producer Brian Eno and sound recording engineer Daniel Lanois, foregrounded soundscapes, atmospherics and layering, resulting in a textural difference from the previous Steve Lillywhite-produced works. In 1987 Bono said, ´The *Unforgettable Fire* was a beautifully out-of-focus record, blurred like an impressionist painting, very unlike a billboard or an advertising slogan… In America there was such a backlash when we put out *The Unforgettable Fire*.´ The title track, particularly when played live, has a laid-back and more middle-of-the-road aesthetic than the band's previous work, largely due to the keyboard and cello, now referred to as the 'Classic Rock' format (DeRiso, N, n.d.).

Bono said of the song, ´Pride is really one of the most unworthy human traits. Strange to call a song "Pride". And it's such a great non-violent anthem.´ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 189). While 'pride' is a catchy word to use as a song title and works well as a hook, it highlights the pitfalls of placing too much importance on an individual word without context. Christian fans have found a way to incorporate ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´ into their U2-inspired, ´U2charist´ services with Debra Dean Murphy framing the song thus: ´And the "pride" spoken of in U2's iconic song "In the Name of Love" (sic) is not the arrogance of the mighty, but the hope of the humble in a God whose justice is cruciform, and whose power is made perfect in weakness…with a lyric that weaves together allusions to events in the lives of

Jesus and King′ (Murphy, 2013). Christian fans read the lyric ‘one man betrayed with a kiss’ as being related to Jesus who was ‘betrayed with a kiss’, although the image on the cover of the single and backstory relayed in popular media relate it to Martin Luther King. Lisa Crafton says that the repeated use of ‘one man’ is evidence of the influence of Kennelly’s ′Book of Judas,′ and that ′the song engages Judas as a force, a trace of something from which we can never quite dissociate.′ (Crafton, 2018, p. 73). A Jewish reading is that ′in the name of love′ resonates with Genesis 22:9–11 and Abraham being willing to sacrifice his son to show his love of God, and that rather than being a quote from the New Testament this is an example of intertextual ‘allusion’ and even ‘hypertext.’

Tim Neufeld and Rev Beth Maynard relate ‘One man come he to justify’ to Isaiah 53:11, which they say is the best-known ‘Old Testament’ prophecy describing the purpose of Jesus' coming: ‘my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.’ ‘Justify’ is a key verb in Christian theology referring to how the grace of Jesus makes believers right with God.’ (submitted by Rev. Beth). This is the text they refer to from a Jewish translation: ‘‘מֵעֲמַל נַפְשׁוֹ יִרְאֶה יִשְׂבָּע בְּדַעְתּוֹ יַצְדִּיק צַדִּיק עַבְדִּי לָרַבִּים וַעֲוֹנֹתָם הוּא יִסְבֹּל׃ He shall see the travail of his soul, he shall be sated with seeing: by his knowledge did my servant justify the righteous One to the many, and did bear their iniquities.′ (Isaiah 53:11, *Koren Jerusalem Bible*). As per the *Koren Jerusalem Bible* translation above, the Jewish reading of Isaiah is that the ‘one man’ or ‘Righteous One’ is not Jesus or any individual, but the Jewish people as a whole. In this context we could say the line in ′Pride (In the Name of Love)′, ‘one man come’ does not actually come from Isaiah, but is an allusion or a lyric intratextuality, serving as an anchor to Biblical ideas.

′Bad′ is the inverse of ′Pride (In the Name of Love)′, revealing the deeply personal experience of the lyricist. Bono wrote ′Bad′ about his childhood friend, Andy Rowan, who spent most of his life struggling with drug addiction and anti-social behaviour that isolated him from his friends and family. The line, ′You twist and turn′ is a direct quote from Psalms (18:28). When U2 performed at Live Aid in 1985, the extended and ad-libbed ′Bad′ took up most of their set. On ′Wire′ the lyrics are poetic but the music, particularly the guitar, is guttural, and the combination of backing vocals and the sounds where the vocal is pushed back in the mix creates a sense of otherworldliness and spirituality.

Here we are again now, place your bets

Is this the time
The time to win or lose
Is this the time
The time to choose

Cold these eyes, I can't believe it
So deep inside a cold fire
Cold, this heart is slow...
Heart is stone.

***The Joshua Tree* (1987)**

U2 had been touring the USA since 1981 and in the later part of the 1980s it seemed the band was focused on the American market. In 1986 they undertook a five-date tour of America under the banner ´A Conspiracy of Hope´ to raise awareness of Amnesty International, alongside Lou Reed, Sting, Peter Gabriel and others. They recorded *The Joshua Tree* (and *Rattle and Hum)* with American collaborators including BB King and Bob Dylan, and producers Daniel Lanois (along with British Brian Eno) and Jimmy Iovine. During this period, U2 were exposed to secular and religious America; liberal and conservative; Democrat and Republican; and it was becoming clear which side the band was on, and that made some of their fans unhappy. Greco says: ´The band were now singing songs of America. These were songs against America (such as "Bullet the Blue Sky"), but they were also songs that sounded like America: rootsy and loud. Bono had been listening to folk music and the blues, and the result was U2's most commercially successful album." (Greco, 2019, p. 29).

The political side of U2 was evident on the album, although the band's Christianity showed itself less confidently: Bono was clear that he still hadn't found what he was searching for (Greco, 2019, p. 29). ´Mothers of the Disappeared´ spoke of the conflict in South America, which Bono was exposed to in Nicaragua and El Salvador in July 1986 when he and his wife, Ali, travelled there following the Amnesty International ´A Conspiracy of Hope´ tour. Bono said, ´I'd been listening to the blues, and immersing myself in American writers, from Native American writing through to black writers like: James Baldwin, Ralph

Ellison and poets and playwrights like Tennessee Williams, Allen Ginsberg, Sam Shepard, Charles Bukowski… I started to see two Americas, the mythic America and the real America… I wanted to describe this era of prosperity and Savings and Loans scandals as a spiritual drought. I started thinking about the desert, and what came together was a clear picture of where I was at…′ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 220).

The Joshua Tree is regarded by many fans and scholars as U2's most Christian album, however many of the biblical references highlighted in existing commentary are not obvious to non-Christians which leaves them open to further interpretation. The influence of the Bible is seen not just in U2's lyrics, but also in its music with *The Joshua Tree* drawing on the band's exposure to Celtic music, American soul, roots, gospel and jazz. The opening sound of the album is a slow-building organ on ′Where the Streets Have No Name′, a sound commonly associated with Church and songs of prayer, and lyrics: 'I wanna run, I want to hide / I wanna tear down the walls / That hold me inside / I wanna reach out / And touch the flame' have an evangelical flair. Applying Moore's approach to popular music analysis it is because of the combination of vocal pitch, lyrics, instrumentation and elements of production that the songs on *The Joshua Tree* are heard in ways unique to individuals, and yet the emotional response is often shared. Biblical imagery of burning (the burning bush), desert, and teaching ('I'll show you a place′): ′I'll show you a place, High on a desert plain, Where the streets have no name… We're still building then burning down love′.

The lyrics, ′Jacob wrestled the angel and the angel was overcome′ (Genesis 32:25, JPS, 1985) in ′Bullet the Blue Sky′ are directly lifted from the Hebrew Bible, with other intertextual references throughout the song. Bono said, ′I wanted something biblical. My understanding of the Scriptures with the Psalms of King David in the lyricism of the King James Bible and I tried to bring that in, to give it religiosity. Then a picture of this face comes up to me, red like a rose on a thorn bush. It was Ronald Reagan which I never told anyone at the time.′ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 223). The meaning of the imagery of the rose is mentioned in the introduction to the Kabbalistic text the Zohar in Chapter 1, ′Rabbi Hizkiyah opened, "It is written, as a rose among thorns." (Song of Songs 2:2) What is the Rose? It is the Congregation of Israel. Because there is a rose, and there is a Rose. Just as the rose among the thorns is tinged with red and white, so is the Congregation of Israel affected by the qualities of Judgment and Mercy. Just as a rose has thirteen petals, the Assembly of Israel is surrounded on all sides by the thirteen attributes of Mercy. Thus, between the first mentions

of the name Elohim, [in the Torah] these [thirteen] words surround and guard the Congregation of Israel′ (Zohar Introduction I:I, n.d Sefaria Community Translation).

Much of the interpretation by fans and scholars has presumed that the album cover's image of the *Joshua Tree* is religious and has linked it to Christianity and that the tree represents the Christian Cross. However, interviews with the band would suggest that while there might be a spiritual element to the styling it was not deliberately Christian. The Edge said the image with the Joshua tree was not an ′allusion to Gram Parsons and Joshua Tree Monument Park′ rather, it was the experience of being ′out there′ in the desert. The Edge said, ′The desert is a transitional place it doesn't have a kind of right or wrong, nor any kind of strong personality. For us it was like a journey through this neutral ground to get where we were going' (Bono et al, 2006, p. 234). Given the spiritual nature of U2's previous albums, it is not unwarranted to seek to establish a close connection between the Bible and the themes and images used on the album and the subsequent tour.

The name Joshua is in common usage because of the Hebrew prophet, Joshua. According to unsubstantiated folklore the Yucca brevifolia were called Joshua Trees by the Mormons. ′Transition is the prominent motif in the first chapter of the Book of Joshua′ (Drucker, 2001, p. 87) as the Jewish people have come out of exile in the desert with a new leader replacing Moses. *The Joshua Tree* also marked U2's transition from Irish to global and signalled the positioning of their music and politics in America. As an album title, and with artwork that physically frames the band as alone in the desert, *The Joshua Tree* suggests U2 are outsiders who, like the people of Moses and Joshua, have travelled through the wilderness and found the place they belong. ′Edge: I think we knew we had something very special. There was a certain moment of it all making sense, when the music seemed to come from nowhere. It didn't have any references to anything else that was going on in the 80s, it seemed to be coming up from the ground.′ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 235).

However, not all Christian audiences embraced the album's spiritual ambiguity. Some evangelical Christians in parts of the USA were reported to have issues with some of the lyrics of ′I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For′, for example, the line ′Felt the healing fingertips they burn like fire/ I have spoke with the tongues of angels′, which in their view turned U2 from a band who believed in God and Jesus to a band who were no longer sure of their spiritual path.

Moving beyond Christian interpretative frameworks, additional nuance can be found in the meaning of ´One Tree Hill´ through a Jewish understanding of the lyric, ´River runs to the sea´ as the phrase is used in Ecclesiastes 1:7: ´All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; to the place where the rivers flow, thither they return'. The first repetition of the chorus in ´One Tree Hill´, is 'You run like a river / On like a sea / You run like a river / Runs to the sea´, then in the second repetition 'you' then changes to 'it', and in the third repetition the lyric is '**we** run to the sea'. Kohelet Rabbah is a midrash on Ecclesiastes with verse-by-verse interpretations, compiled between the 6th and 8th centuries. The work mostly presents material from earlier sources, including the Jerusalem Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. Ecclesiastes is interpreted in the midrash as a religious allegory. Composed in Talmudic Israel/Babylon (c.700–c.950 CE) Kohelet Rabbah 1:7:7: ´all the rivers go to the sea,´—all the dead enter only the grave, but the grave is never filled, as it is stated: ´The grave and oblivion are not sated…´ (Proverbs 27:20). You might say that once they die in this world they do not live again in the World to Come; the verse [therefore] states: ´To the place that the rivers go, they go there again´—to the place that the dead gather in the World to Come, there they return and are destined to recite songs in the messianic era. What is the reason? ´From the ends of the earth we have heard songs´ (Isaiah 24:16); ´your dead will live, my corpses shall arise´ (Isaiah 26:19). This method of analysis can also be applied to the line 'I'll see you again when the stars fall from the sky', which implies a belief in the afterlife and the world to come in accordance with Jewish text and tradition.

***Rattle and Hum* (1988)**

Rattle and Hum represents a pivotal moment in U2's engagement with American musical traditions, particularly those with roots in African-American culture. This exploration intersects interestingly with the band's ongoing, albeit often subtle, dialogue with Hebrew Bible themes. The album's immersion in blues and gospel forms echoes the way these genres have historically drawn upon Old Testament imagery and narratives. Notably, U2's collaboration with B.B. King on ´When Love Comes to Town´ incorporates biblical allusions that resonate with both Christian and Jewish traditions. The song's lyrics, while not directly quoting scripture, evoke themes of redemption and divine justice found throughout the Hebrew Bible, particularly in prophetic literature. Moreover, the album's exploration of American roots music indirectly engages with the Jewish experience in America. As Jon

Stratton argues in his work on Jews and popular music, Jewish artists have often engaged with African-American musical forms as a means of negotiating their place in American culture (2009, p. 80). While U2 approaches this tradition from an Irish perspective, their engagement with these musical forms—which are themselves steeped in Old Testament imagery—creates an indirect link to the Jewish experience of biblical interpretation through popular culture.

Rattle and Hum is the soundtrack to the documentary movie of the same name. It is a hybrid of recorded and live, reworked and new, cover versions and snippets of other artists, and interview snippets. Like its predecessor *The Joshua Tree*, *Rattle and Hum* again sees U2 exploring a musical lineage with intertextual references to their heroes. Accompanied by a film release that positioned the band as disciples of the great American musicians who had come before them, *Rattle and Hum* went to great lengths to show the connection between U2's work, the traditions of gospel and rhythm and blues and the broader rock and roll canon. The Beatles and Hendrix were represented on *Rattle and Hum* with Lennon referenced in ′God Part II′, B.B. King was co-opted for ′When Love Comes To Town′, and Bono claimed ′Love Rescue Me′ is essentially a Bob Dylan song. Produced by Jimmy Iovine, *Rattle and Hum* lacks the aesthetic nuance and Celtic sensibility of the band's earlier albums, focusing on a more American point of view with covers of songs by American artists and a Hendrix-style version of the ′Star Spangled Barrier′. Iovine's style as a producer is the polar opposite of Eno; Iovine produces product; Eno's philosophy is to produce sound, with the result lacking the musical depth and atmospherics of Eno-produced T*he Unforgettable Fire*.

In total there are 12 'original' tracks on *Rattle and Hum*: ′Van Diemen's Land′; ′Desire′; ′Hawkmoon 269′; ′Silver & Gold′; ′Angel Of Harlem′; ′Love Rescue Me′; ′When Love Comes To Town′; ′Heartland′; ′God Part II′; ′Bullet The Blue Sky′; ′All I Want Is You′ with biblical references scattered throughout the album. However, not all of the songs have explicit biblical resonance—opening *Rattle and Hum* with ′Helter Skelter′ and Bono saying 'this is a song Charles Manson stole from the Beatles, we're stealing it back' can be seen as U2 positioning themselves as successors of the Beatles; however there are other messianic and religious cult associations with Manson's use of the song that have been explored at length by other popular music scholars.

On *Rattle and Hum*, references to the Hebrew Bible become more nuanced compared to

U2's earlier works. These allusions permeate not only the lyrics but also manifest through associations with Lou Reed and Bob Dylan, as well as the Tanakh's impact on African American Gospel and Blues traditions. While ´Silver and Gold´ and ´Love Rescue Me´ overtly employ scriptural language, other indicators of U2's enduring spiritual connection are embedded within American motifs, mirroring their presence in postmodern US media and political discourse—discernible to those attuned to such references. This album marks a significant shift from the band's initial era, largely abandoning its earlier naivety in favour of a more accusatory tone and cynical perspective. Notably, ´Silver and Gold´ features U2's first explicit critique of ecclesiastical institutions, with Bono asserting, 'The God I know isn't short of cash mister.' This lyric, coupled with its condemnation of apartheid, firmly aligns U2's politico-spiritual stance with marginalised and oppressed communities.

An example of where the Tanakh is hidden in plain sight is in the portrayal of Billie Holiday as the fallen angel in ´Angel of Harlem´. As Galbraith argues, the song juxtaposes the power of Holiday's angelic voice with her struggle with racism and alcoholism as an ´angel in devil's shoes´ (Galbraith, 2012, p. 186). In the Hebrew Bible and Jewish translations 'angels' are not ascribed male or female, as according to Jewish tradition an angel is a spiritual being and does not have any physical characteristics. The angelic descriptions provided by the prophets—such as wings, arms etc.—are anthropomorphic, referring to their spiritual abilities and tasks. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (Maimonides) (1135–1204), rabbi and physician who composed philosophical and medical works and the great rabbinical text *Mishneh Torah* explains in *Laws of the Foundations of the Torah* 2:7, that all angels fall under one of 10 ´ranks´ according to the degree of the angel's understanding of God and his ways. Furthermore, as Sforno also explains: ´When angels appear to humans in human garb this is not considered a prophetic vision, i.e. it is something of a lower order of Divine manifestation.´ (sefaria.org.) Holiday being described as an angel fits with this interpretation, as her voice might have been 'divine' but her physical being was not angelic because it was in a human form, thus marking her as being in the 'devil's shoes'.

5. Exploring ERA 3—*Achtung Baby*/*Zooropa*/*Pop*

Achtung Baby **(1991)**

Having recorded and released seven albums and an EP in eight years, from 1980 to 1988,

U2 recorded *Achtung Baby* in Berlin, their first time making an album in continental Europe, and continued to expand their influences, including the sources of Bono's lyrics. Recording *Achtung Baby* at Hansa Studios in Berlin, U2's collaborators are significant in this era as U2 continued to position themselves into the rarefied space literally occupied by their heroes, in this instance Iggy Pop and David Bowie who recorded at Hansa before them. By this stage in the life of U2, the members had become well travelled and Bono was focusing on activism, as he details in his memoir, *Surrender: 40 Songs, One Story*. It was also the first album on which they expressed an ´interest in the real world as well as the otherworldliness of spiritual life,´ as the Edge and Bono noted in an interview with Stephen Mooallem and Davis Guggenheim (2011).

In the 1990s, U2's sound was less focused on American blues and rock than it had previously been, and more influenced by Europe and the exploding club scene. In 2021 a radio program on RTE, Dave Fanning and music journalist John Meagher noted that the cover of ´Night and Day´ U2 recorded for the *Red Hot & Blue* AIDS benefit album was the first time this change in direction was heard. Noel McLaughlin agreed, writing ´a key moment in the group's career: (was) the overt and much discussed transformation that occurred as the 1980s gave way to the 1990s, between the sixth and seventh studio albums. As has been widely acknowledged, this period marked a decisive break in the group's oeuvre and gave rise to a whole series of stylistic and contextual tensions that had interesting consequences for Irish popular music and Irish identity.´ (McLaughlin, 2014, p. 180). This inference can be drawn from the pronouncement that U2 are ´ready for what's next´ (´Zoo Station´), framing the journey as similar to that of the ancient Jews wandering in the Egyptian desert during the Exodus, ready for whatever God throws at them (See Chapter 2). ´Zoo Station´, the opening track of *Achtung Baby* (1991) sets a scene that is sonically and lyrically gyrating, edgy and innovative, matching a marching drum beat with repetitive lyrics. Bono sings that he'll be: ´I'll be crawling around / On my hands and knees´ (´Zoo Station´), and even in this aggressively electronic mode this can be seen as a Biblical allusion that sets the tone for an album that is loaded with the lyrical language and references that explicitly and implicitly reference the Hebrew Bible.

´Even Better Than the Real Thing´ further explores this new direction for U2, where they incorporate their evolved personal and religious beliefs and experiences in more subtle ways than they have on previous albums. Who, in ´Even Better Than the Real Thing´ takes ´me´ or

´us´ higher? Is the band being elevated by the audience or is the implication that the experience of the song is spiritual and uplifting and collectively the band and the audience are having a religious experience, an experience of godliness? When Bono sings ´Give me one more chance, and you'll be satisfied / Give me two more chances, you won't be denied´ he uses Biblical language and invokes the commandments of the laws spelt out in Leviticus 19 'Kedoshim', related to holiness, specifically "לֹא תִגְנֹבוּ וְלֹא־תְכַחֲשׁוּ וְלֹא־תְשַׁקְּרוּ אִישׁ בַּעֲמִיתוֹ: You shall not steal. You shall not deny [a rightful claim] and each one of you shall not lie to each other.´ (כָּחַשׁ is to deceive or deny).

Well my heart is where it's always been
My head is somewhere in between
//
We're free to fly the crimson sky
The sun won't melt our wings tonight…
Take me higher, take me higher
You take me higher, you take me higher.

Deane Galbraith notes the idea of the 'fallen angel' in ´Christian tradition, the Devil or Satan is the leader of all the fallen angels, the first to descend from his former position as a leading angel in the highest heaven. One of Satan's titles, Beelzebub, is popularly translated as "the Lord of the Flies"—a fact that suggests that Bono's Fly is in service to the Devil.´ (Galbraith, 2012, pp. 179–194.) Galbraith argues, ´The most formative and influential formulations are to be found in the apocalyptic writings of early, pre-Rabbinic Judaism and in early Christianity. The earliest surviving account of fallen angels is found in the Book of Watchers, written no later than the third century BC (sic) and possibly even earlier.´ (Galbraith, 2012, p. 182). Rabbi Sacks notes two Rabbinic scholars, Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) and Nahmanides (aka Ramban, 1194–1270) identified the idea of the fallen angel in Genesis 6.2: 'the [males among the] divine beings saw how pleasing the human women were and took wives from among those who delighted them'.

The words and ideas of the Hebrew Bible provide an explicit foundation for the lyrics of *Achtung Baby* including the songs ´One´, ´Until the End of the World´ and ´Mysterious Ways´, all of which are public explorations of the Spirit and the spiritual and rich in metaphors that allow listeners to interpret in their own way. Bono said ´"One" feels like an

unfinished song. The listener finishes it′ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 281). On ′Ultraviolet′ Bono introduces the ‘lightbulb’ which becomes a recurrent theme throughout the subsequent albums, with the lyric ′your love is a lightbulb′. By the time of the *iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour* (2015) the lightbulb has become a central image, linking the bedroom where Bono wrote the earliest U2 songs to t*he Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience* albums, marking the fifth era as a period of reflection, when the band members are entering their 60s. This idea of love being ‘illuminating’ connects to the Kabbalistic teachings about God and light and relates to marriage, which in Judaism is sacred and between two people creating a light and completing a circle.

***Zooropa* (1993)**

The recording of *Zooropa* followed the sessions for *Achtung Baby* and it was released less than two years after *Achtung Baby*. The eerie sonic opening of *Zooropa* (1993) contrasts sharply with the early images of U2, from the docks of Dublin to the big hair and hats, and traditional rock and roll sounds of the *Joshua Tree* and *Rattle and Hum*. The sounds invoke feelings of displacement and disembodiment. Produced by Flood, Brian Eno and The Edge, and written in the six months between legs of a world tour, *Zooropa* was intended to be an EP but ended up as a full album with 10 tracks recorded in six weeks. In many ways *Zooropa* is an afterthought, the leftovers of *Achtung Baby* and raw experimentation with The Edge’s spoken word vocal on ′Numb′, and ‘atmospheric’ backing vocals with Brian Eno on ′Lemon′. Much of the critical music coverage of the album, and particularly the single, ′Lemon′, focused on Bono’s vocal and the use of rhythm and programmed drums. The sound and format of the music had evolved and adapted with the use of technology and pushing boundaries in studio recording, but it was in the lyrics and live performance where *Zooropa* was cemented as canonistic work. The biblical references are concealed in plain sight, for example while the first part of the single ′Lemon′ is sung in a falsetto, after a vocal key change it takes on a Biblical style of narrative storytelling:

Midnight is where the day begins (x3)
Lemon / See-through in the sunlight
A man builds a city with banks and cathedrals
A man melts the sand so he can see the world outside (you're gonna meet her there)
A man makes a car (she's your destination) and builds a road to run them on (gotta get to

her)

A man dreams of leaving (she's imagination) but he always stays behind

Tim Neufeld references Numbers for ´Lemon´: ´And when you're dry / She draws her water from the stone´ Numbers 20:8: ´[God said to Moses] "Take this staff and assemble thee community, you and your brother Aaron, and in their presence order the rock to yield its waters. From the rock you shall bring forth water for the community and their livestock to drink."´[6] However, there is another relevant Biblical reference ושאבתם ´And you shall draw water with happiness from the wellsprings of salvation´ from Isaiah 12:3 which the Jewish sages associate with the water libation brought on the holiday of Sukkot. In the Temple times, Sukkot, the Harvest Festival, was one of the three annual pilgrimage festivals when all Jewish men were required to be in Jerusalem. It was a time of celebration when the Levites played flutes in the Temple every day, except Shabbat. Sukkot is now observed by building and dwelling in temporary ´booths´ covered in organic matter that is no longer in the ground, such as palm leaves and bamboo (the roof covering is known as 's'chach' סכך). For Orthodox Jews, Sukkot is the time to pray for rain, and it is when God decides how much rain will fall for the next year.

There is a concealed Kabbalistic reference to the Bible in the lyric 'Midnight is where the day begins' as Shiloah notes, ´Under the influence of the Zohar and the Safed kabbalists, the idea of rising at the midnight hour to sing became very popular´ (Shiloah, 1992, p. 149). This practice finds scholarly support in Garb's analysis of Hasidic mystical temporality, where he documents how Safrin described ´transforming the Evil Impulse into the heat of the holy fire through the joy of Talmudic study´ and specifically emphasized study after midnight: ´There is nothing in the world greater than the study of Torah at night, specifically after midnight, and it shines the soul and draws the Shekhina on the one who studies, and he attains true ruah ha-qodesh from the inner aspect´ (Garb, 2020, p. 131). Garb notes this practice was presented as both universal—´almost all the aspects of Judaism depend on it´—and as leading to ´true mystical attainment´ (Garb, 2020, p. 131). This tradition has deep philosophical resonance with earlier Jewish thought, as Maimonides states in *The Mishneh Torah* (c.1176–1178 CE): ´Even though it is a mitzvah to study during the day and at night, it is only at night that a person acquires most of his wisdom... Our Sages declared: "The song of Torah can [be heard]

[6] Tim Neufeld's reference can be found at https://www.allu2songslyrics.com/2009/09/bible-references-in-u2-song-lyrics.html— note the original was published on the now deleted @u2.com

only at night, as [Eichah 2:19] states: Arise, sing out at night...” Whoever occupies himself with Torah study at night will have a strand of [Divine] favour extended over him during the day, as [implied by Psalms 42:9]: “During the day, God ordains His kindness and, at night, His song is with me, a prayer to the living God.”′ Given the significance of Psalms in Bono's frame of reference, the lyric can also be seen as a reference to Psalm 119:62: 'I arise at midnight to praise You for Your just rules'. Although the Jewish calendar marks the new day as starting at sunset, the physical action of performing prayers at midnight represents what Garb identifies as ′a movement through inner time, which at times overlaps with ritual time′ (Garb, 2020, p. 132).

The first three songs on the album have clear textual patterns with repetitions of the one word that is the song title: ′Zooropa′, ′Babyface′, ′Numb′. The text of these three songs is modernistic, more in a stylised rap format, highlighted by The Edge’s spoken word vocal on ′Numb′, and his ‘atmospheric’ backing vocals with Brian Eno on ′Lemon′. Much of the critical music coverage of the album, and particularly the single, ′Lemon′, focused on Bono’s voice and the use of rhythm and programmed drums. The monotone of The Edge speaking the lyrics to ′Numb′ is like the congregation, with Bono backing him up like a cantor reaching to the top of his voice, although highly unlikely that any cantor would use the type of falsetto Bono employs. The word ′Numb′ as a verb appears a number of times in the Hebrew Bible, of course depending on the translation. Psalms 88:16: עָנִי אֲנִי וְגֹוֵעַ מִנֹּעַר נָשָׂאתִי אֵמֶיךָ אָפּוּנָה: ‘I am afflicted and close to death from my youth up. I suffer Thy terrors, I am numb’(*Koren Jerusalem Bible,* sefaria.org), in the Contemporary Torah JPS, 2006 Genesis 45:26 וַיָּפָג is translated as numb, with the English translation being ‘to grow numb, be feeble’, be benumbed’ ie ‘And they told him, “Joseph is still alive; yes, he is ruler over the whole land of Egypt.” His heart went numb, for he did not believe them’ (Genesis 45:26).

Steve Stockman (Stockman, 2005, p. 115) notes that when writing the ′The Wanderer′ Bono had Ecclesiastes in mind, and Bono confirmed this in his memoir *Surrender: 40 Songs One Story* (2022), noting that in the KJV version of the Bible its narrator is ‘The Preacher’. Ecclesiastes is one of the five scrolls in the section of the Hebrew Bible called Writings and is often read publicly on the holiday of Sukkot. The book’s opening verse attributes Ecclesiastes to a son of King David (traditionally identified as King Solomon) and the book explores the meaning of life, reckoning with death, futility, and purpose. Ecclesiastes often suggests that ′all is vanity′ and ′nothing is new under the sun,′ but also concludes by

asserting that life's purpose can be found in fear of God and adherence to God's laws. The melody of the ´Wanderer´ lends itself to the words of Ecclesiastes 12:2-12, which can be read in place of the song lyrics, although there are no examples of this having occurred in any Christian or Jewish setting to date.

***Pop* (1997)**

With its overt themes of consumerism, vibrant loud imagery and incorporation of dance music, *Pop*, like the albums before it, is richly focused on themes of life and death, however its deep Biblical references are often obscured by the musical production. *Pop* was produced by Flood, Steve Osborne and Howie B, transposing U2's rock forte into production values with a more electronic bent. During the 1990s Osborne partnered with DJ Paul Oakenfold on Perfecto Records, remixed ´Mysterious Ways´ and other U2 songs, and Oakenfold toured with the band as one of the opening acts for their Zoo TV world tour. These connections made the style of *Pop* seem like a natural evolution of U2's *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa* sound, venturing even further into beats and club aesthetics.

Playing against the stereotype of club music as superficial, *Pop*'s lyrical content is spiritual and self-reflective, with music that connects on a deep level. Club music relies on feelings and communal experiences. This album could be seen as U2 taking that live experience of the Zoo TV tour and trying to capture it in the studio in a new way. Like *Achtung Baby* this album had its problems with Bono spending time away from the band on his side projects and focusing less on the album. Niall Stokes notes that calling an album 'Pop' was U2 pushing back at categorisation (2005, p. 124). While some of the production influences imply U2 is forsaking the old to embrace the new, the structure of the songs, the flow of the album and the lyrical themes are not substantially different from the band's previous work. There is ambiguity that perhaps comes from the use of 'unorthodox production techniques', as Samantha Bennett argues in her analysis of ´MOFO´ leading her to ask 'If the band were not clear about what it was they were trying to achieve, how would they know when they had achieved it?' (Bennett, 2018, p 154).

The opening track, ´Discothèque´ with lyrics about bubble-gum and dance music, led commentators to categorise *Pop* as the least spiritual of U2's albums, a view that was reinforced by the release of remixes and video clips using electronic mash-up, situated voice,

and the band performing in drag. Greg Garrett in *We Get to Carry Each Other: the Gospel According to U2* notes that to Christian fans *Pop* seemed ‘so dark, so angry, so… faithless’ (2009, pp. 28-29), writing ´the Hebrew tradition in particular is full of lamentation, where a speaker cries out to God or even takes God to task, a practice that makes many Christians feel uncomfortable´. With *Pop*, U2 pushed back against the American Evangelical Christian idea of Christian music. There are still elements that Christian U2 fans and scholars managed to see as a reflection of their own point of view, however deeper analysis can show a stronger interrelationship to the Jewish tradition, such as in ´Wake Up Dead Man´:

Your Father
He made the world in seven
He's in charge of heaven
Will you put a word in for me

The Torah contains numerous instances where God refers to the Jewish people as his 'children'. The first occurs when God sends Moses to Pharaoh: ´And you shall say to Pharaoh, thus says the Lord, Israel is My son, My firstborn´ (Exodus 4:22, JPS, 1985). This paternal relationship is further developed in Psalm 2:7, where King David declares: ´He said to me, “You are My son, I have this day begotten you”´. The concept of divine fatherhood is deeply embedded in Jewish liturgy. In the Amidah, recited three times daily, worshippers address God as father multiple times: ´Cause us to return, our Father, to Your Torah... Pardon us, our Father, for we have sinned... Merciful Father, have compassion upon us... Bless us our Father, all of us as one´ (Siddur Ashkenaz, Sefaria.org). Similarly, the ´Avinu Malkeinu´ prayer, recited on fast days, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the days between these holidays, begins each petition with ´Our Father, our King´ (אבינו מלכנו), emphasizing both God's paternal care and sovereign authority. This theological framework demonstrates that U2's reference to God as father in ´Wake Up Dead Man´ draws from a rich Jewish tradition that predates and informs Christian understanding.

Pop’s narrative is a complex one, loaded with ambiguity, with song titles like ´If God Will Send His Angels´, ´Last Night on Earth´, ´Wake Up Dead Man´ and ´Gone´. Analysing these sombre songs alongside the overtly poppy ´Discotheque´ and ´The Playboy Mansion´ demonstrates the duality and complexity of what U2 was undertaking with this work. *Pop* contains lyrics that can be interpreted as being about close encounters with death and dying

or about the dearth of spirituality in the consumer culture U2 had previously showcased throughout the *Zooropa* period and particularly with the Zoo TV tour. The testing questions ′God's got his phone off the hook, babe, Would he even pick up if he could?′ (′If God Will Send His Angels′) and ′Are you still holding on?′ (′Gone′) demonstrate religious, and spiritual themes and feelings, but are combined with a somewhat cynical and materialistic flavour, reflected in the production which leans heavily on foregrounding electronic synthesised sounds.

Scholarly analysis of *Pop* tends to focus on the elements of the album that are visually and sonically obvious, so the use of technology in both art and sound. All the images associated with *Pop* are bright and modern and in a style associated with Andy Warhol and the New York Pop Art scene, but underneath those pop images is a metaphor for how musicians and audiences deal with rapid change in society and culture. *Pop* as an album is complex in many ways. It saw U2 experimenting with sound and storytelling. The production of ′Discothèque′, the club-influenced sounds of ′Do You Feel Love′ and ′MOFO′, led to *Pop* being received by many critics and fans as an album that did not fit with U2's rock aesthetic, even though lyrically *Pop*'s narrative continued to explore the common themes expressed in U2's songs—of faith, sex and death. For example, the lyrical and musical construction of ′If You Wear that Velvet Dress′ has subliminal elements of questioning faith, with ambiguous references to the moon, the sun and prayer. Bono states. 'We can write sexy songs and spiritual songs - and songs that are both. We can write anything we want and get away with it' (Stokes, 2005, p. 136). ′If You Wear That Velvet Dress′ is an example of this duality. While the image most commonly associated with the velvet dress is one of a woman, a lover, red velvet robes are also traditionally associated with priests and the lines ′I never listened to you anyway′ and ′I've got my own hands to pray′ can be read as a sign of Bono's continued rejection of formalised religion and the Christian idea that God needs to be spoken to by intermediaries.

It's okay
The struggle for things not to say
I never listened to you anyway
And I got my own hands to pray
But if you wear that velvet dress

The release of the single ´Please´ in 1997 saw U2's most active involvement in Ireland's politics since Bono declared ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ was not a rebel song. The cover artwork of ´Please´ features the four Northern Irish politicians involved in the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein; David Trimble, British First Minister of Northern Ireland; Ian Paisley, Northern Irish loyalist politician and Protestant religious leader Democratic Unionist Party (DUP); and John Hume, Irish nationalist politician, founder of Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The defining image of Northern Ireland's progress to peace was a photo of Bono standing between David Trimble and John Hume, holding their hands up.[7] U2 had played at the Concert for Yes, which took place on 18 May 1998 in front of about 2,000 schoolchildren, and three days later, Northern Ireland overwhelmingly endorsed the Good Friday Agreement in a referendum. The only time U2 toured Israel was with the *PopMart Tour,* also performing in Belfast, Sarajevo and South Africa, places affected by internal wars with religious undertones.

6. Exploring ERA 4—*All that You Can't Leave Behind, How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb, No Line On The Horizon*

***All that You Can't Leave Behind* (2000)**

Released in late 2000, *All that You Can't Leave Behind (ATYCLB)* opens with one of U2's highest charting singles, 'Beautiful Day' and one of the most obvious Biblical lyrics in U2's oeuvre. The lyric 'after the sun all the colours came out' explicitly references the Biblical story of Noah and the flood. ´Beautiful Day´ started its evolution as a demo track titled ´Always´, however a Wordcloud analysis of the lyrics (see Appendix) shows there are very different keywords used in the two versions.

In ´Beautiful Day´ God's presence is openly referred to with explicit use of Biblical text 'see the bird with a leaf in her mouth / After the flood all the colours came out', a quotation of the Biblical story of Noah (Genesis: 6:9–11:32). Producer Daniel Lanois (Stokes, 2015, p. 147) described the song as being ´like a hymn´, by this implying it is devotional, written for use as a prayer. The structure of ´Beautiful Day´ follows the verse /chorus /repetition format,

[7] See https://www.theguardian.com/music/2023/apr/15/belfast-1998-peace-concert-waterfront-bono-bertie-ahern-neil-hannon-northern-ireland

allowing others to join in the singing. The backing vocal, a simple 'ahhhh' is like the keddusha, performed as a hum by members of the audience/congregation.[8] Other elements of 'Beautiful Day' are infused with Hebraic ideas, for example the line, 'Take me to that other place, ***teach*** me', strongly references the Jewish concept that religion and belief are based on teaching. Unlike earlier creeds which saw gods as objects etc, as the first monotheistic religion, whose doctrine was based on text, Judaism focuses very much on learning both the text and the oral knowledge that has developed alongside it.

˝Elevation˝, another single from *ATYCLB* is high energy and uplifting with the lyrics 'the goal is elevation' performing a dual meaning: the physical and spiritual elevation from being part of a participatory performance, 'You make me feel like I can fly, so high' is ambiguous as the 'you' can be God, the audience, the bandmates, anyone or anything, with Stokes (2005, p. 150) observing that when singing ˝Elevation˝ Bono 'howls like a priapic dervish'. When played live the song has the effect of both physically and emotionally elevating the audience who follow Bono's movements and hand gestures to 'elevate' themselves, jumping in time en masse. He sings '***Love***, lift me out of these blues / Won't you tell me something true / I believe in you', both the 'love' and the one who 'lifts' are ambiguous and can be read as love of God, love of other people, love of a soulmate. U2's well-established intertextual referencing of the Bible affords resonance between ˝Elevation˝ with the devotional passages of the Davidic Psalms, particularly Psalm 69 where David beseeches God to lift him up out of the dark place. King David was known as the ˝sweet singer of Israel˝ whose lyre playing soothed King Saul (1 Sam 16) and who established music as an official part of Israel's public religion (1 Chr 15:16) (Friedmann, 2014, p. 24).

Written for Myanmar's Democratic Opposition Leader Aung San Suu Kyi, who at that time had been under house arrest since 1989, (Stokes, 2005, pg 151), ˝Walk On˝ is rich with themes of injustice and longing. The lyrics reference a darkness in ˝And if the darkness is to keep us apart. And if the daylight feels like it's a long way off˝, however the vocal is in a high key creating a juxtaposition of light and dark. 'A place that none of us has been' is heaven, while 'flown away' is the dove seeking 'freedom'. Bono lists actions that can be left behind,

[8] Under the influence of the mystical movement known as Merkava mysticism, this passage was expanded in Byzantine Palestine into a ritual called Sanctification: the congregation, normally silent during the precentor's recitation of the benedictions, breaks in by reciting aloud several biblical verses, including ˝Holy, holy, holy, the Lord of Hosts! The whole earth is full of his glory!˝ (Isa. 6:3) and ˝Blessed is the glory of God from his place˝ (Ezek. 3:12), thereby imitating the praise of God by the angels, as described by the prophets. Raymond P Scheindlin, *Communal Prayer and Liturgical Poetry*, pp 42-43

‘all that you fashion, all that you build, all that you make’. These are also things that are forbidden on the Jewish Sabbath. As stated in Exodus 31.16.17: ′The Israelite people shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout the ages as a covenant for all time: it shall be a sign for all time between Me and the people of Israel. For in six days יהוה made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day [God] ceased from work and was refreshed.′ The Bible does not list the activities that are prohibited on Shabbat, nevertheless in the *Mishna* the Rabbis detailed 39 major categories of forbidden labours that are based on the work required to build the Tabernacle in the desert, and which ceased on Shabbat.

How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb **(2004)**

Bono’s father, Bob Hewson, died in August 2001 from cancer and as Adrian Deevoy noted his death was documented on *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (*HTDAAB),* directly on ′Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own′ (a version of which U2 played at Hewson’s funeral) and ′One Step Closer,′ and indirectly on ′All Because of You′ and ′Crumbs From Your Table′. The album credits for ‘One Step Closer’ thank Noel Gallagher of Oasis. According to *U2 by U2* the title of the song comes from a conversation Bono had with Gallagher about Bono's dying father, Bob Hewson. (Bono asked, ‘Do you think he believes in God?’ to which Gallagher replied, ‘Well, he's one step closer to knowing.’) (U2, 2006 p. 411).

U2 often delves into universal themes that resonate with a variety of spiritual and philosophical perspectives, certain songs exhibit parallels to Jewish themes, often using metaphor in a lyrical style that bears similarity to the Biblical Song of Songs. On *HTDAAB* these songs are ‘City of Blinding Lights’, ‘All Because of You’, ‘A Man and a Woman’, ‘Crumbs from Your Table’, ‘One Step Closer’, ‘Original of the Species’, and ‘Yahweh’. *HTDAAB* starts with a typical U2 single, upbeat and energetic: ′Vertigo′. The key message is that ‘you’ can dismantle an atomic bomb by being part of a movement, a collective, not acting in your own individual interests. ′Vertigo′ has a dark, edgy element in both the lyrics and the mix.

The metaphor of “Your heart is a bloom” on the previous album’s ′Beautiful Day′ is mirrored in the lyric from ′Vertigo′— ‘the jungle is your head’. The lyrics describe the

danger of solitude in times of mental chaos and how this brings with it an inability to discern the correct course of action. Such situations can make individuals feel out of control and unable to manage their thoughts. With ´Vertigo´ there is a motion of spinning out of control but not going over the edge, even though the mind might go there. Recognising this dark place and knowing that it is possible to recover from it can be read as an expression of faith.

Describing ´Miracle Drug´, which was written about Bono's high school friend Christopher Nolan (who was paralysed from birth but learnt to communicate with a pointer) Steve Stockman (2016) on his blogpost Soul Surmise gives a Christian viewpoint: ´In this song there is faith going out to the miracles of medicine. There is the idea that failure is not when you seem to be getting nowhere but when you quit trying. There is a quote from the Gospels too—"I was a stranger/You took me in". In Matthew 25… The treatment of the alien or stranger is a major concern to God throughout the Bible. He is all about the refugee. The Children of Israel were refugees as they fled Egypt where they were aliens and were brought by God to the Promised Land.´ These biblical stories told by Matthew and quoted by Stockman are Jewish stories, and the treatment of the stranger is embedded into Jewish culture and religious practice. In Judaism the precedent for belief in both God and science is notably foregrounded by Maimonides in the *Mishneh Torah*.

´A Man and a Woman´ explores themes of relationships and reconciliation, a recurring motif in Jewish teachings, where 'man' and 'woman' are spoken of as two sides of a broken whole. Judaism places great emphasis on repairing and maintaining relationships, reflecting the idea of Tikkun Olam, the concept of ´repairing the world´ through acts of kindness and reconciliation. The song's exploration of human connection resonates with Jewish values of compassion and unity, themes that are also present in ´Crumbs from Your Table´ a song whose title itself invokes the need for charity and generosity, themes that are central to Jewish belief and ethics. The lyrics, ´You speak of signs and wonders, but I need something other´ echo the idea of searching for deeper spiritual meaning beyond the external, paralleling the Jewish pursuit of spiritual growth beyond ritualistic acts. The Edge saying: ´We've always been political in an organic way. I thought actually this would be a more political album. I think Bono did, too. I'm amazed at how personal it is. It's not a manifesto. It's about what matters. It's an honest snapshot of where we're at.´ (Edge, 2004, u2.com). Reflecting this thought, ´Original of the Species´ has themes related to the creation (Genesis 1:1) and the sanctity of life reflected in lyrics: ´You are the first one of your kind´ and ´show your soul´.

Said to have been written by Bono for the Edge's oldest daughter, Hollie, the lyrics reflect anticipation and hope, themes that are inherent in Jewish eschatological beliefs, where the world awaits a time of ultimate redemption and wholeness.

The Hebrew Bible is directly present in the title of the track ´Yahweh´, which is a transliteration of one of the names for God used in the Bible, although Jews do not say the word out loud. Everett Fox (1995, p 2)[9] notes ´The name of God has undergone numerous changes in both its writing and translation throughout the history of the Bible. At an early period the correct pronunciation of the name was either lost or deliberately avoided out of a sense of religious awe... Both old and new attempts to recover the "correct" pronunciation of the Hebrew name have not succeeded; neither the sometimes-heard "Jehovah" nor the standard scholarly "Yahweh" can be conclusively proven.´ Importantly Fox notes, ´the precise pronunciation of biblical Hebrew cannot be determined with certainty.´ Jews do not pronounce ´Yahweh´ which U2 sings as 'yah-wey', in an Evangelical Christian style, but nonetheless the term is taken directly from the Hebrew Bible where it is written Hebrew ה' ה' and transliterated as Y H V H. The letters are pronounced individually 'yud - hey - vav - hey' and are not spoken as one word by Jews.

> 'I didn't want to offend anybody here. It's a big word. A name not written down in strict Hebrew circles. And even some not so strict just have it without the vowels YWH. And I understand that we should come towards God with a sense of awe. Because Christianity has allowed Christ to be a friend to us as well as master and Lord; we may take that access a little bit for granted, but Yahweh was one of the names for God. When Moses spoke to the burning bush he said, "Who are you?" And the bush spoke back to him, "I am who I am". Yahweh The Great I Am. I came across it whilst singing without knowing really what I was singing. It's a sound I was making in my mouth that turned into a prayer.´ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 412).

While Bono acknowledges the truth of the Hebrew Bible, his interpretation of Y - H - V - H is questionable. The *Koren Jerusalem Bible* translation is, ´And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, "Moshe, Moshe." And he said, "Here I am."´ In the original Hebrew text the name of God is written as אֱלֹהִים not as the Tetragrammaton ה' ה'.[10]

[9] see The Five Books of Moses, by Everett Fox. New York, Schocken Books, 1995, via sefaria.org

[10] From Sefariag.org ´The Tetragrammatonשם הויה: The Hebrew letters 'yud,' 'hey,' 'vav,' and 'hey' (in English, YHVH) form what is known as the Tetragrammaton, or God's four-letter name. Given the longstanding Jewish prohibition

Exodus 3:4 Hebrew	***Koren Jerusalem Bible* translation**	***JPS Tanach* 1917 translation**
וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו **אֱלֹהִים** מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּנִי׃	And when the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, ´Moshe, Moshe.´ And he said, ´Here I am´.	And God said unto Moses: 'I AM THAT I AM'; and He said: 'Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel: I AM hath sent me unto you.'

Figure 1: Translations of Exodus 3:4

***No Line on the Horizon* (2009)**

No Line on the Horizon was in part recorded in Morocco with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois following an invitation for Bono to attend the World Sacred Music Festival in Fez. The sessions picked up from work U2 started with Rick Rubin in 2006. There are musical and lyrical references in various songs to the sounds, words and feelings evoked by experiencing other places and thoughts, with the vocals firmly influenced by Morocco. Jewish and Muslim cultures were historically separate in Morocco and the Fez Spiritual Music Festival featured few Jewish performers, so in many ways, U2 are remixing and repurposing a whole other range of influences and then incorporating the Anglo and Ashkenazi musical sensibility. This stylistic appropriation is a hallmark of Eno's work—there is no careful referencing to the original music makers and their history, the intertextuality hinted at in found sounds and layering. ´U2's hymnic allusions do not explicitly disclose their liturgical origins; rather, they are subtly woven into the sonic fabric of *No Line on the Horizon* in ways that are suggestive, evocative, and usually highly ambiguous´ (Galbraith, 2014, p. 120).

The cedars in the Hebrew Bible may be taken literally or symbolically, according to Ibn

against speaking God's name aloud, the word's original pronunciation is unclear, and it is traditionally not pronounced as written. Instead, a variety of substitutes are used—like "Adonai" ("My Lord") and "Hashem" ("The Name")—depending on the context.´

Ezra representing ′young, great, rich, mighty, and the kings.′ In Isaiah 2:13, the phrase ′Against all the **cedars of Lebanon /** Tall and stately / And all the oaks of Bashan′ serves as a reminder that pride and hubris can lead to downfall, a message deeply relevant in the contemporary world where unchecked egotism can lead to ethical and societal unravelling. Similarly, the imagery of the ′Cedars of Lebanon′ contains a cautionary tale. When talking about writing in the third person Bono said, '...I allowed myself to wear the clothes of characters that wandered into my imagination. So the guy in (new song) “Cedars of Lebanon” is a war correspondent.' Referencing Ezekiel adds depth to the symbolic reference to ‘the cedars’ as Ezekiel 17:3-4 recounts the story of Babylon's conquest of Jerusalem using the imagery of a cedar tree. This fallen cedar signifies the collapse of power and the dire consequences of human misjudgement. U2’s modern version can be seen as a commentary on the transience of geopolitical dominance and the necessity of humility in international relations. U2’s ′Cedars of Lebanon′ is descriptive, drawing a scene, and has rhythmic patterns similar to Isaiah and can be read at the same pace. On ′Cedars of Lebanon′, the backing vocalist sings, ‘Return the call to home’ and is followed by Bono softly beseeching God in a spoken-word style: ′You're so high above me, higher than everyone / Where are you in the Cedars of Lebanon?′

The title, ′White As Snow′ also resonates with Isaiah 1:18: ′Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as **white as snow**; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool′ with Galbraith noting the song is ′An example of U2’s alchemical mixture of the sacred and the profane′ (2014, p. 127). The lyrics are credited to U2, Lanois and Eno, who according to Lanois were looking to incorporate elements of an old church hymn to create a new one. Lanois recounts that he studied spirituals and one stood out: ′an old church hymn called “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”. It’s not identical, but it's inspired by that, an old public-domain melody. I laid down a little piano version of that song and, again, chopped it to a tempo. Then I came up with a vocal arrangement.′ (Frenette, 2009). This insight into the production of ′White As Snow′ is indicative of U2’s collaborative songwriting process and confirms that they draw inspiration from myriad sources, many of which themselves are shaped by the influence of the Hebrew Bible.

′Unknown Caller′ starts with a reference to 3.33 (′3.33 and the numbers fell off the clock face′). Galbraith and others have noted that Bono revealed in interviews that he regards

Jeremiah 33:3 (or ′J33:3′) as ′God's phone number,′ because it contains Yahweh's comforting words to the suffering and imprisoned prophet Jeremiah: ′Call to me and I will answer you.′ Jeremiah is a major Jewish prophet, with the Books of Jeremiah and Lamentations traditionally attributed to him. The Book of Jeremiah was composed in Judea/Israel c.600–c.500 BCE. It is the sixth book of the Prophets, with prophecies from the period leading up to the First Temple's destruction as the Babylonian empire was on the rise, Jeremiah warning that Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonians as punishment for the sins of Israel.

Galbraith offers an interpretation of ′Unknown Caller′ in accordance with the Christian tradition: ′Just when the song's protagonist has lost almost all hope, the unknown caller offers him or her the terms of Christian salvation, delivered in Apple-Mac-like formulae…′ and finds ′the melody of the two initial bars of the instrumental section has been uplifted from the chorus of the hymn "My Saviour's Love". In the original hymn, the lyrical content that accompanies the two bars of music is the refrain "How Wonderful! How Marvellous!" Therefore, if listeners recognize the hymnic allusion, they will be furnished with the precise words of the protagonist's "shout for joy"′ (Galbraith, 2014, pp. 128–129). This is an example of where Christianity and Judaism differ as a Jewish reading of that ′shout for joy′, referring to Jeremiah in its original, unmediated context without the meaning ascribed by the Church, says the text is not about Christ, but that God has saved his people, the Israelites and that as Friedmann notes (2014, p. 147) ′singing for joy is a recurrent motif in the Hebrew Bible… the psalms treat joy and songs as near synonyms′.

7. **Exploring ERA 5—*Songs of Innocence/Songs of Experience/Songs of Surrender***

***Songs of Innocence* (2014)**

Songs of Innocence marked the start of a fifth era in U2's chronology. Notably, there was a significant hiatus of approximately five and a half years between the release of their preceding album, *No Line on the Horizon*, and *Songs of Innocence*, with only the single ′Ordinary Love′ released in 2013. Written for the film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*, there are two versions of ′Ordinary Love′ one with the lyrics, ′Your heart is on my sleeve′ and the other, ′Forgive and receive / It's the same thing′. In 2014 U2 received a reported sum of US$100 million from Apple to distribute *Songs of Innocence* across every iPhone, a move

that generated considerable media attention. The members of U2 were early venture capitalists, investing in new technology and ideas that have changed the way humans communicate and consume music. The band members have demonstrated throughout their careers that they are willing to experiment with different mediums even if it means changing the direction of some of their previous approaches and potentially alienating some of their fan base. Despite speculations in the media suggesting that the forced download marked the end of U2's career, the band adhered to their customary practice of touring a new album and embarked on the *iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE* tour, commencing in Vancouver, Canada.

The lead single, ´The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)´, was used for an Apple Inc product launch to coincide with the release of the viral digital album. Joey Ramone isn't named in the song, but the miracle is: ´I woke up at the moment when the miracle occurred / Heard a song that made some sense out of the world´. It follows therefore that if the ´song that made some sense´ is one of Joey Ramone's then the sense of the world it reveals is innately Jewish. While the Jewishness of The Ramones was not explicit in their music and lyrics, as Jon Stratton argues the Jewish background, and particularly the connection that some of the members had with the Holocaust, affected their worldview and created a pervasive ´anxiety over domination and subordination´ that was expressed in their songs (Stratton, 2005, p. 92). The aesthetic of ´The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)´ is mainstream rock rather than punk, so the use of Joey's name is obtuse, but it could indicate that Bono has become increasingly aware of the practice and influence of Judaism, even moreso if the lyrics are read as a reference to the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:11):

> We got language so we can't communicate
> Religion so I can love and hate
> Music so I can exaggerate my pain, and give it a name.

Songs of Innocence signalled another creative turn for U2, with collaborations with younger producers Ryan Tedder, Danger Mouse and Paul Epworth replacing the experimental sonic arrangements and incorporation of found sounds that had come to be expected of a project with Brian Eno. Swedish indie artist Lykke Li provided guest vocals on ´The Troubles´, her voice functioning as a response to Bono's lead vocal throughout the track, while Pulitzer Prize-winning American rapper Kendrick Lamar contributed the spoken word introduction to ´American Soul´ marking U2's first collaboration with a hip-hop artist on their

studio recordings. The album is autobiographical, referencing the Ramones, the Beach Boys and the political and social environment the band grew up in with songs like ´Raised by Wolves´, ´Sleep Like A Baby Tonight´ (about paedophile priests), and ´The Troubles´. There are two lyric versions of 'The Troubles':

´The Troubles´ (original version)

Somebody stepped inside your soul
Little by little they robbed and stole
Till someone else was in control
…
God knows it's not easy
Taking on the shape of someone else's pain
God now you can see me
I'm naked and I'm not afraid
My body's sacred and I'm not ashamed

´The Troubles (Alternative Version)´ U2.com

Somebody stop the world I'm on
Somebody throw a line to me,
Somebody tell me what to say
….
I stepped outside like I had never seen the night before
Looking at the stars that never looked so bright before
This crooked heart it never felt so light before
A brand new man, I'm a brand new man.

Songs of Innocence and the follow-up, *Songs of Experience* are companion albums, the first referencing the beginning of U2's career and the latter their twilight years which relates to the concept of ´baal teshuva´: returning to one's roots. U2's return to the spiritual consciousness of their youth, as exemplified in these albums, represents what Judaism considers to be the universal process of rediscovering their 'true nature' as they age. The inspiration for the album is connected to William Blake's collection of poems, *Songs of*

Innocence and of Experience and Ginsberg's album of folk songs setting Blake's poems to music, also called *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1970, MGM/Verve Forecast Records). Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* presents contrasting states of the human soul, although further exploration of the connection with Blake is not within the scope of this study. The return to the early days of the band is represented on the cover art of *Songs of Innocence*, a photo of the naked torso of Larry Mullen Jnr's son being embraced by his father, which is a hypertextual reference to the youthful Peter Rowan (the younger brother of Derek Rowen aka Guggi, a Dublin artist and member of The Virgin Prunes, a band who were friends and collaborators with U2) depicted on the cover of the *Boy* album, signalling that the boys of the previous era are now men with children of their own.

***Songs of Experience* (2017)**

In *U2 by U2*, Bono expresses his struggle with the concept of death, describing it as a recurring theme centred on the loss of his mother and the subsequent quest to find new meaning in life (Bono et al*,* 2006, p. 223). This motif resurfaces in *Songs of Experience*, where Bono confronts his own mortality through introspective songwriting. The album opens with the track ´Love Is All We Have Left´, which also serves as the opening number for the live *eXPERIENCE + iNNOCENCE* arena shows in 2018 and sees Bono dealing with another death: his own. The live show opened with a video prequel to ´Love Is All We Have Left´, the sound of a beating heart and vision from an MRI played on the screen hanging over the stage, accompanied by a recorded voice, clearly medical, saying ´Breathe in, breathe out´. Close followers of the band's narrative were shocked by the scene which suggested that Bono may have suffered a serious cardiac incident at some point. ´Love Is All We Have Left´ can be interpreted as a conversation with a loved one and, simultaneously, as a reflection on the songwriter's relationship with God.

The lyric in ´Love Is All We Have Left´, ´I wanted the world but you knew better / And that all we have is immortality´ embodies the concept of eternity as expressed in Jewish liturgy for the weekday prayers according to the Ashkenazi rite, composed in France (c.1055–c.1105 CE) with commentary from the Kuzari (written by Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, c. 1140) and the Vilna Gaon (in italics).

אַתָּה גִּבּוֹר לְעוֹלָם אֲדֹנָי מְחַיֵּה מֵתִים אַתָּה רַב לְהוֹשִׁיעַ:

> **You are mighty forever,** *****_God's rule of the world is permanent and perpetual.—Kuzari_ **my Master; You are the Resurrector of the dead** *****_This is the emphatic expression of our belief in the immortality of the soul.—Kuzari_ **the Powerful One** *****_This passage begins the section of Shemoneh Esrei called "Gevuros" (Might) and its major theme is to praise God as "the Mighty One." Who alone restores man to life, health, freedom, and well-being.—Vilna Gaon_ **to deliver us**. **—**Siddur Ashkenaz, sefaria.org

In Judaism, the continuity of faith and the honouring of God is exemplified through the pursuit of performing good deeds (mitzvahs) and the act of procreation, which is regarded as a form of immortality and is also represented on the cover art of *Songs of Experience*, which features two figures, Bono's son and The Edge's daughter. The phrase ´You argue because you can't accept´ addresses spiritual scepticism, arguing with God and the human condition regarding the afterlife, death, and dying, reflecting Bono's long-standing rejection of formal religion, coupled with his oft-stated faith and belief in God. Individuals contest the existence of God due to their unwillingness to confront their own mortality. ´Love Is All We Have Left´ underscores the love for God and serves as a reminder that love is the only enduring force when all other hope seems lost, and that even when you feel like all hope is gone it is ´the only thing that can be kept´.

This idea of accepting God and the inevitability of life is also present in ´Lights of Home´ from the opening lyrics, ´I shouldn't be here cause I should be dead, I can see the lights in front of me´ to the repetition of ´free yourself to be yourself´, the idea of letting go and accepting God. ´One more push and I'll be born again´ speaks to U2 not being ´born again´, recalling that they abandoned Shalom and its organised evangelism.

> I believe my best days are ahead
> I can see the lights in front of me
> Oh Jesus if I'm still your friend
> What the hell, what the hell you got for me.

Much of *Songs of Experience* is autobiographical in a more direct sense, rather than merely reflecting faith and a worldview. ´Landlady´ serves as an ode to Bono's wife Ali, while ´The Showman (Little More Better)´ connects to the theme of ´Lights of Home´ with

the lyrics, ´I was born from a screaming sound´ and ´Baby's crying cause it's born to sing / Singers cry about everything´, linking birth and life to sound and singing. ´You're the Best Thing About Me´ initially appears to be about Bono's marriage, but when he asks ´Why am I walking away?´, it suggests an alternative interpretation. This echoes the refrain from ´I Will Follow´ where he sings ´if you walk away, I will follow´, reinforcing the notion that many of U2's songs can be interpreted as being about any form of love, whether divine or physical. The Edge comments on this ambiguity: ´Like a lot of our songs, we don't like it to be so specific that there is no other interpretation. “Get Out Of Your Own Way”... we are all our own worst enemies. It's about getting on with what we really want to do. We could do a lot more but we always get in our own way. I know I do.´[11]

The subtextual biblical message in ´The Little Things That Give You Away´ (2015) becomes evident if the opening lyrics: ´the night gave you a song, a light had been turned on´, are read as a version of Psalm 42:9: ´Yet the Lord will command his steadfast love in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, a prayer to the God of my life´. Furthermore, with the subsequent lyrics, ´Where all the darkness is swarming / And it covers me in fear / Sometimes I’m full of anger and grieving / So far away from believing / That any sun will reappear´ echo the Psalm: ´I will say to God my rock, Why hast Thou forgotten me? why go I mourning under the oppression of the enemy´. Both the song and the Psalm employ a powerful contrast between darkness and light as metaphors for spiritual and emotional states, a connection also in Ecclesiastes 2:13: ´I found that Wisdom is superior to folly / As light is superior to darkness" (JPS, 1985). The Psalm's ´night´ and the song's ´darkness´ represent periods of doubt and despair, while the ´song´ and ´light´ in both texts symbolize hope and divine presence. The Psalmist's questioning, ´Why hast Thou forgotten me?´ finds a modern parallel in the song's expression of being ´So far away from believing / That any sun will reappear´. This similarity in emotional trajectory—from despair to a glimmer of hope—is characteristic of many Psalms and reflects a common structure in Jewish liturgical music, where laments often transition into expressions of faith or praise. The song's contemporary language and imagery effectively modernise the ancient theme of spiritual struggle found in the Psalm.

Songs of Surrender **(2023)**

[11] https://www.brucedennill.co.za/2017/12/01/music-interview-u2-songs-experience-letters-loved-ones/

Songs of Surrender was released in 2023 as a 'companion album' to Bono's 2022 *Surrender: 40 Songs One Story* with the full track listing of 40 previously released U2 songs re-recorded in an acoustic style. It is available in various formats and configurations as a 16-track, 20-track and 40-track album. Given that it was released as I was concluding my research, and in light of previous versions of all the tracks being available, I have not examined *Songs of Surrender* in this thesis.

8. **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the influence of the Hebrew Bible on U2's oeuvre, revealing a consistent thread that runs through their work across five distinct eras. The analysis demonstrates that U2's engagement with Biblical themes, particularly those rooted in Jewish tradition, extends beyond the commonly recognised Christian interpretations. U2's use of Biblical references is dynamic, evolving with the band's spiritual and artistic journey. In their early work, Biblical allusions often served as straightforward expressions of faith or existential questioning. As U2's sound and lyrical approach matured, these references became more layered and ambiguous, inviting multiple interpretations and resonating with diverse audiences. This evolution is particularly evident in albums like *Achtung Baby* and *Pop*, where Biblical themes intertwine with contemporary cultural critique and personal introspection. Examining U2's work through a Jewish lens, rather than solely through the prism of Christianity, allows for consideration of the original Hebrew context of many Biblical references. This approach offers an additional perspective to previous scholarly analyses, extending the meaning ascribed to U2's lyrics. The presence of Hebrew Biblical themes throughout U2's career, from *Boy* to *Songs of Experience*, suggests the ongoing relevance of these ancient texts in contemporary culture. U2's recontextualization and reinterpretation of these themes for modern audiences illustrates the adaptability of the Hebrew Bible's narratives and teachings.

CHAPTER 4: Is A Jewish Perspective of U2 Different?

1. Biblical interpretation

Christianity's dominance in the West is evident in studies of popular culture. In contrast, there is a noticeable lack of research on the relationship between Judaism and U2, mirroring the experience many Jews have in increasingly secular modern societies. This gap is particularly pronounced when considering Jewish women's experiences in line with Wald's (2011, p. 7) argument: ´Jewish listening is always gendered, and that inquiry into modes of listening "Jewishly" may provide us with key insights into the identity-formation of (Jewish) girls and women, those subjects who have traditionally been marginalized in studies of (Jewish) popular music.´ As Rabbi Sacks has noted, Jews often find themselves ´living between the cracks,´ (2015, rabbisacks.org) striving to heal a fractured world through their very existence. As a minority religion, Judaism is less familiar to many and, consequently, less frequently recognised or understood in popular cultural texts.

Christian interpretation of the Bible typically emphasises uncovering multiple layers of meaning, including historical, symbolic, moral, and eschatological aspects. This approach often focuses on connecting the so-called Old Testament passages to Christian beliefs and teachings. Abrams (1999, p. 133) outlines a typical set of interpretive distinctions:

> (1) the literal or historical meaning which is a narrative of what in fact happened; (2) the allegorical meaning proper, which is the New Testament truth, or else the prophetic reference to the Christian Church, that is signified by a passage in the Old Testament; (3) the tropological meaning which is the moral truth or doctrine signified by the same passage; and (4) the anagogic meaning, or reference of the passage to Christian eschatology, that is, the events that are to come in ´the last days´ of Christ's judgement and the life after death of individual souls.

In contrast, in the Jewish tradition there is an acknowledgment of multiple methods of understanding the Torah, each with countless possible interpretations. This diversity of interpretation leads to the presence of various Torah commentators who may have differing views on the literal meaning of a verse and each of the four interpretive levels of PaRDeS opens up numerous pathways for interpreting the Torah. Just as Wald emphasises the importance of examining Jewish listening practices to understand marginalised perspectives,

these multiple interpretative approaches allow for diverse voices and understandings to emerge.

The Talmudic scholar Rashi (Solomon ben Isaac, 1040–1105, aka Shlomo Yitzhaki) wrote the most influential commentary of the Hebrew Bible (Lawee, 2019, p 1). This work is seen as an enduring example of ´peshat´, a straightforward interpretation of the words contained in the Torah. For example, Rashi's explanation of the Psalms is simple and leaves little room for misinterpretation: ´This book was composed with 10 expressions of song: 1) with conducting, 2) with melody, 3) with musical accompaniment, 4) with song, 5) with praise, 6) with prayer, 7) with blessing, 8) with thanksgiving, 9) with praises, and 10) with 'Praise God.' These correspond to the 10 men who composed them: 1) Adam, 2) Malchizedek, 3) Abraham, 4) Moses, 5) David, 6) Solomon, 7) Asaph, and 8-10) the three sons of Korah.´ So central to Jewish scholarship is Rashi's commentary on the Bible, that it was the first Hebrew book to be printed mechanically. This balance between direct interpretation (peshat) and deeper meaning found in traditional Jewish exegesis provides a model for examining U2's lyrics, which similarly operate on multiple levels of meaning.

As Jews became more isolated and endangered in the later Middle Ages, ´derash´ became the preferred method of Biblical interpretation (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 496). During the Enlightenment, Jewish scholars began to delve into the more esoteric ways of understanding, such as ´remez´ and ´sod´, observed in the illustrations in Jewish prayer books of the era, such as the *Oppenheimer Siddur*. An example of remez is the allegorical reading of the ´Song of Songs´, referred to by art historian Shalev-Eyni and others as the ´expression of the bond of love between God and the Jewish people, kneset Yisrael´ (Wijsman, 2023, p 672). Following the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis identified the need to preserve the Torah (the written law) and the oral law that had been transmitted by the leaders of each generation (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 498). The study of oral law relied on memorisation and repetition. Eisenberg notes ´halakot´ (laws) developed from multiple sources including local laws and customs, historical traditions, priestly rituals, judgements and rabbinic pronouncements and decrees which led to debate between various Rabbis about the true meaning of various halakot and led to them establishing their own academies to teach according to their own approaches.

The earliest Rabbinic book *The Mishnah* was compiled by Judah ha-Nasi in the early

third century, recording the disagreements among the sages, followed by *The Talmud,* a compendium of the discussions and interpretations of *The Mishnah* by scholars known as 'amoraim' (Aramaic for 'those who discuss')" (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 501). There were two versions of *The Talmud*: the more authoritative Babylonian Talmud, completed around 500 BCE, and the *Jerusalem Talmud* which was completed in the early 5th century and subsequently fell out of favour. ´The Rabbis of *The Talmud* painstakingly dissected every word or phrase of *The Mishnah* to search for its underlying meaning.´ They used a 'case history approach' to develop ´halakhah´, ´often engaging in hotly disputed arguments before the problem was resolved´ (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 502). Each page of *The Talmud* is laid out with *The Mishnah* and Gemara situated in the centre in larger type surrounded by the medieval commentaries by Rashi and the Tosafists, with cross-references to other Talmudic sources. Furthermore, as per sefaria.org, sections of the Midrash appear in *The Talmud,* Midrashim being literature that interprets and elaborates upon biblical texts, mostly compiled from the 5th century CE through the Medieval period.

In *Reading the Underthought: Jewish Hermeneutics and the Christian Poetry of Hopkins and Eliot,* (2010) Kinereth Meyer and Rachel Salmon Deshen establish a Jewish framework for analysing the religious Christian poetry of Hopkins and TS Eliot. Like Meyer and Deshen, who are both professors in the Department of English at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, I have approached my study of U2 from a Jewish perspective, with more knowledge of Rabbinic study methods than of Christian. This approach aligns with Wald's emphasis on the importance of Jewish listening practices and acknowledges the gendered nature of Jewish cultural engagement. I too, am not in any way proposing that my reading supersedes the Christian male gaze, or is any more valid or authentic, but I aim for it to add another perspective and another approach for analysing U2's work, particularly considering the traditionally marginalized voices of Jewish women fans. As Meyer and Deshen note: ´No one-to-one relationship exists between our interpretive practice and that of the Rabbis, just as there is no standardisation (or sometimes even family relationship) between one rabbinic interpreter and another. Nevertheless... thinking about texts in this Jewish sort of way has implications for the way we can bring home to ourselves the texts of another tradition´ (Meyer & Deshen, 2010, p. 75).

The name of the Christian evangelical group Bono, Larry and The Edge belonged to in the 1970s was Shalom, commonly translated from Hebrew to English as meaning 'peace'. In

Jewish texts and thinking the word 'shalom' has many meanings and applications. Shalom is known as one of the names of God and can also be a person's name (usually male, sometimes female); it is used to greet the Sabbath, and to preserve the sanctity of marriage (´shalom bayt´—peace in the home). Shalom ´is rooted in the word שלם (shaleim), which means completion. Without peace, there can be no completion...´ (Benjaminson, n.d) Its appropriation by these young Christians in Ireland demonstrates the broader cultural migration of Jewish concepts into other faith traditions.

2. Connections Between Jewish practice and U2

a) ´I got my own hands to pray´[12]

After the Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE Jews continued to gather and pray. When the Jews returned to Jerusalem after 70 years exile, the text of the daily prayer, known as the ´Shimone Esrei´ (the ´Eighteen Benedictions´), was set by Ezra the Scribe and the 120 prophets and sages of the Great Assembly, who made it a permanent institution and duty in Jewish life to recite this prayer three times daily. Subsequently, it became ´halakha´ (law) for all Jews to pray three times a day following a fixed order of prayers. The main parts of the prayer include the ‘Shema and’ the ‘Shimone Esrei’ (or the 'Amida'), while the daily Psalm, which used to be sung by the Levites in the Holy Temple, became part of the morning prayer, with other Psalms of David included in the morning prayer. The morning prayer is called ‘shacharit’, the afternoon prayer is ‘minchah’ and the evening prayer is ‘maariv’.

The Jewish calendar is lunar, following the moon and the ebb and flow of the tides, and women have special prayers and practices that mark the beginning of each month. Elul is the month that ends the year with Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, and Rosh Hashana, literally translated as the ´Head of the Year´ and commonly known as the New Year. The annual festivals of Sukkot, Passover and Shavuot, provide opportunities for additional communal prayers and rituals and are linked to the pilgrimage festivals from the time of the Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem. The structure of Jewish communal prayer is built around these calendar cycles as well as daily prayers: the ‘Shema’ with its blessings, and the ‘Amida’.

[12] "If You Wear That Velvet Dress"

Beyond these major pilgrimage festivals, the annual cycle includes winter celebrations of Hanukkah and Purim, and summer fasts of Tammuz and Av, along with various minor festivals and fast days. These elements are woven together with a systematic cycle of Torah readings throughout the year. The integration of fixed daily prayers with these cyclical elements creates a dynamic liturgical tradition that goes far beyond simple ´daily repetition of nearly identical texts.´ (Scheindlin, 2002, p. 41)

The practice of Judaism is characterised by a cyclical pattern of observances, as prescribed in the Hebrew Bible. Central to this cycle is the observance of the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, during which Jews abstain from all forms of work and dedicate themselves to prayer and study. This concept of sacred time has resonated beyond Jewish circles, as evidenced by Bono's reflection in his memoir *Surrender* (2022, p. 356): ´I've always revered the concept of the Sabbath even if it's just a Sabbath hour... a time to stop doing and start being´. This sentiment is further echoed in Bono's lyrics for ´Landlady´, a song from U2's album *Songs of Experience*, which explores themes of home and family: ´she says don't do just be´. The significance of the Sabbath in Jewish tradition can be traced back to ancient liturgical practices. As Sarna (1962, p.155) notes, ´Psalm 92 was the Psalm for the Sabbath Day as the Levitical choir in the Second Temple chanted each day of the week a chapter of the Psalter to accompany the libation of wine that followed the *tamid* offering´. This practice was part of a larger liturgical framework, with rabbinic sources indicating that ´the seven selections were the Hebrew Psalms 24, 48, 82, 94, 81, 93, and 92´.

Psalm 92
A psalm. A song; for the sabbath day.
טֹוב לְהֹדֹות לַיהוָה וּלְזַמֵּר לְשִׁמְךָ עֶלְיֹון׃
It is good to praise the LORD,
to sing hymns to Your name, O Most High,
לְהַגִּיד בַּבֹּקֶר חַסְדֶּךָ וֶאֱמוּנָתְךָ בַּלֵּילֹות׃
To proclaim Your steadfast love at daybreak,
Your faithfulness each night
עֲלֵי־עָשׂור וַעֲלֵי־נָבֶל עֲלֵי הִגָּיֹון בְּכִנֹּור׃
With a ten-stringed harp,
with voice and lyre together.

The Jewish Sabbath occurs from sunset on Friday night to after sunset on Saturday night with synagogue services on Friday night followed by a celebratory meal. This Shabbat meal has been featured heavily in popular culture, in television shows and movies, usually to signify that a character is Jewish. The rituals are 'time bound' and as such candles must be lit before sunset when the Sabbath starts, and evening prayers must conclude within a certain time so that the Kiddush prayer can be said. Singing features in Judaism in both synagogue service and prescribed rituals. When recited in the home, the Kiddush prayer is usually sung, with the melodies varying according to the family tradition, followed by the blessing of wine and then bread and a meal. The 'bentching' (blessings) known as ברכת המזון (*Birkat ha-Mazon*), the Grace After Meals concludes the proceedings. These non-Synagogual traditional ritual songs are found in all Jewish ethnic groups and have three common elements: they are in Hebrew, they are basic texts (the Tanach, prayers), and occasions and events that mark the cycle of Jewish life (Shiloah, 1992, p. 159).

The importance of singing is explored by Friedmann, who notes it has positive benefits: ´Awareness of the power of breath contributed to the development and predominance of singing in Jewish worship. From the beginning Jewish prayers have mostly been sung or chanted rather than plainly spoken. Theologically, this reflects a belief in that God rejoices in the singing of his people. On a practical level, the custom owes to the positive emotional, physical and psychological benefits of singing.´ (Friedmann, 2014, p. 63). Communal singing particularly serves to elevate the connectedness of the community and heightens emotions and feelings of togetherness. Each week on the Sabbath a prescribed portion of the Torah is read in the synagogue so that by the end of the annual cycle the whole Torah has been read by the community.

b) ´Blessings aren't just for the ones who kneel´ (´City of Blinding Lights´)

U2 closed their 360° Tour on July 30, 2011 in Moncton, Canada with Bono reciting a version of the Priestly Blessing (Numbers 6:23-26), also known as the Aaronic Blessing, when Aaron and his sons were commanded to continue to recite to bless the Jewish people throughout the generations (Ramban on Numbers). This is the oldest Jewish blessing, and in many communities it is said by Jewish fathers on Friday night when they bless their children as part of the Kiddush service prior to the Sabbath evening meal. After the band had played ´40´ Bono recited the following:

Tell Aaron and his sons, ‘This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:
May the Lord bless you and protect you.
May the Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.
May the Lord turn His face toward you and grant you peace'.

Leonard Cohen had used the same words to end his concert in Tel Aviv less than two years earlier, suggesting a close mirroring of Cohen by U2. ´Cohen raised his hands and parted his fingers. He switched from English to Hebrew…the language of the priests, fifteen words. He blessed the people and left the stage´ (Friedman, 2022, p. 186). Leonard Cohen was a direct descendant of a Jewish priestly family and was entitled to perform this gesture, his use of the Blessing marking a ceremonial end to a communal religious experience. The words of the Priestly Blessing are, as Rabbi Sacks notes, ´among the oldest continuously-used words of blessing ever´, with Jews also reciting the words daily at the beginning of the morning service. Rabbi Sacks says, ´They are widely used by non-Jews also. Their simplicity, their cumulative three-word, five-word, seven-word structure, their ascending movement from protection to grace to peace, all make them a miniature gem of prayer whose radiance has not diminished in the more than three thousand years since their formulation.´

Numbers 6:23-26
The Lord bless you and protect you
The Lord deal kindly and graciously with you
The Lord bestow His favour upon you and grant you peace

There is documented, non-academic evidence of Bono's recognition of the significance of Judaism and the Hebrew Bible. In January 2010 Bono paid an impromptu visit to Park East Synagogue at the invitation of the community’s Rabbi Schneier. A YouTube video shows him looking nervous as he stands on the ‘bima’, the raised platform in the middle of a synagogue where the members of the congregation and the rabbi stand when they are reading the Torah, in front of the Ark which houses the congregation’s precious Torah scrolls. Bono is wearing a white yarmulka (an identifiable Jewish skullcap) and delivers the speech to the Park East Synagogue that he has given many times about the need for all to take collective action to solve world poverty. In the speech, he refers to the Jewish congregation he is addressing as the original knowledge holders saying, ´this idea (of equality) began with you

guys′. He sings an abridged acapella version of ′I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For′, the lyric 'I believe in the Kingdom come, when all the colours bleed into one, but I still haven't found what I'm looking for'."

Bono and Rabbi Schneier connected through the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, an interfaith partnership of leaders from various world religions, founded by Holocaust survivor Rabbi Schneier in 1965. The organisation is ′broadly similar′ to Bono's ONE organisation, focusing on international development and relief issues, including slowing the spread of HIV/AIDS and malaria (O'Doherty, 2010). Seen by the Irish press as a political statement to counter those who opposed U2's inclusion of Tel Aviv in Israel on the *PopMart Tour,* Bono used this appearance not to articulate a political position on Israel/Palestine, but rather to demonstrate his connection to and knowledge of the Hebrew Bible and its relationship to Jewish identity.

The basic premise of the Hebrew Bible and of Judaism is that God is not a person or a thing, but a presence, and there are ways of interpreting and understanding this presence and the relativism of God. The most significant split on practice came with the evolution of Christianity, but there have been many other so-called 'false prophets' who have claimed they know the secrets of the Hebrew Bible and are its true adherents. There are currently fewer than 20 million people spread throughout the world who formally identify as Jewish, the majority of whom reside in Israel. Only those who have matrilineal Jewish heritage are considered Jewish, and conversion to Orthodox Judaism is an arduous and difficult process. Despite now having a homeland where Judaism is the predominant religion, and well-established communities in other countries, the Jewish people are still fragmented and there are differences in practices according to family and community traditions which have often evolved over time because of restrictions imposed by the state to oppress Judaism.

Throughout the last 3,000 years, religious leaders have tried to keep Jewish people and practices separate from secular society. Jewish food, days and times of prayer and places of worship are markedly separate to non-Jewish. The Rabbis have also at times tried to restrict the influence of the music of non-Jews (Cohn-Zentner, 2019). Central to Judaism is the Tanakh, also referred to as the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. To Jews, the Bible is the proof text, handed to Moses directly from God. It underpins the entire premise of Judaism. It tells the story of human experience, all under the watchful eye and hand of God, from

creation to the sibling rivalry of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, the escape from Egypt led by Moses, exile in the desert and worshipping at the sacred temple in Jerusalem, and lays out the moral code by which humans should conduct their lives.

´Torah study´ is said to be the unifying expression of Jewish faith—within Orthodox Jewish communities all Jews are expected to learn Torah, and in some ultra-Orthodox communities, men study Torah as their full-time occupation. Learning is not just of the Tanakh, but of the Rabbinical commentaries written throughout the ages and collated into texts known collectively as *The Talmud*. The Bible is the only central, unifying, written religious code that dates back more than 3,000 years. Inevitably the way the Bible is interpreted and used has varied considerably over that time.

In 1999 Bono wrote an introduction to a Book of Psalms published by Cannongate, saying ´Psalms and hymns were my first taste of inspirational music. I liked the words, but I wasn't sure about the tunes—with the exception of Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd". I remember them as droned and chanted rather than sung. But they prepared me for the honesty of John Lennon, the baroque language of Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen, the open throat of Al Green and Stevie Wonder. When I hear these singers, I am reconnected to a part of me I have no explanation for—my "soul" I guess.´ (Bono, 1999) Bono's autobiography clearly positions him as a follower of Christ and a believer in God, but he makes a point that he does not subscribe to any particular church. The other band members are less vocal about their beliefs. Larry Mullen Jnr is reportedly a committed Christian, as is The Edge. Without focusing too much on the personal lives of the band members, their faith activities are important because of the musical aspects of modern worship. Where and when they were exposed to religious music, and to what extent music was used to inspire and motivate them individually and communally is a key to understanding why U2's music has such a spiritual element and a deep effect on listeners.

That the 'moral position' of the band is essentially Christian has been discussed in both academic and popular press. Greco acknowledges that the Christian religious impulse in U2's music can be reframed as 'humanism', a philosophy that is represented in both Judaism and Christianity. The promulgation of U2's faith is not solely Christian and there is evidence that they are not seeking primarily to express that Christianity through their music. U2's lyrics refer to ´signs and wonders´ that link their spirituality to thoughts and feelings that are not

explicitly Christian, finding their songs of faith are also songs of love. The obvious reference to Jesus in ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´ in the line ´one man betrayed with a kiss´ is acknowledged as one of the most passionate lines in their repertoire by non-Christian listeners. In more recent times the lyric has been changed to ´one boy never to be kissed´ in reference to the death of a child refugee on a beach, implying an absence of godliness in the actions of humanity.

The writings and analysis of the Jewish sages can focus on intricate details and contradict each other leading to different Jewish schools of thought and yeshivas, where students learn according to the teachings of different rabbinical traditions. ´Every letter of a word, every phrase, was open to interpretation, for the Bible, God's Word, was expressed in a certain way to teach or explain something. For rabbis, nothing in Scripture is superfluous and every word has many meanings, some more apparent than others. Indeed, one will often find contradictory statements from various rabbis made about the meaning of a word, and one interpretation is not more acceptable than another. The multiplicity of meanings does not challenge scriptural authority, but rather reflects its infinitude´ (Bakhos, 2021, p. 294).

There are existing methods for analysing popular songs that have resonance with these methods. A plain or simple reading is taking the song at face value, so for example using this approach U2's ´Beautiful Day´ is interpreted as being about the beauty of the day, and the world, ´It's a beautiful day, don't let it get away´. An allegorical reading of the text might refer to particular hints or allusions, so for example, ´after the flood all the colours came out´, drawing on the Biblical story of Noah, indicates a prophetic Biblical narrative. This layered approach to textual interpretation parallels what Burns and Lacasse (2018) describe as the different forms of intertextuality in popular music. Their framework recognizes that intertextual relationships can range from explicit quotation (similar to ´peshat´, or literal reading) to more subtle allusion and hypertextuality (comparable to ´remez´ and ´derash´), providing a theoretical structure that complements traditional Jewish hermeneutics when analysing U2's biblically-influenced lyrics. The application of gematria to U2's lyrics offers an interpretive approach that aligns with Jewish mystical traditions, revealing potential meanings that extend beyond conventional analysis.

c) ´Take me to that other place´ [13]

In Jewish mysticism and Biblical interpretation, gematria serves as a sophisticated analytical method that correlates Hebrew letters with numerical values, enabling scholars to extract concealed significance from religious texts. This interpretive approach, dating back to at least the second century CE, showcases the complex interplay of musical, mystical, and mathematical elements within Jewish exegetical and spiritual practices. Gematria is typically classified under the broader concept of ´remez´, which refers to implied or allegorical meanings in text, one of the levels of PaRDeS.

While gematria has ancient roots, its prominence grew significantly in the period following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and the Sephardic diaspora in 1492, after which mystical approaches to texts gained particular importance among Jewish communities. As Shiloh notes, ´For Jewish mystics, music "has its source in the divine"´ (1992, p. 132), highlighting the spiritual resonance attributed to numerical and musical patterns in sacred texts. This period saw the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*Book of Splendor*) become ´the major source of esoteric studies,´ further emphasizing the interconnectedness of mystical thought and textual interpretation. Kabbalists, in particular, developed sophisticated applications of gematria: ´For the kabbalists, the manipulation of the text was taken to an extreme with techniques such as *gematria* (using the numerical values of letters, words, and phrases to make connections and form conclusions); *notarikon* (forming acronyms from initial letters); and *temurah* (where letters are exchanged for those preceding or following them in the alphabet)´ (Miller, 2020, p 350).

These techniques were seen as ways to unlock the Torah's deeper significance, based on the belief that it served as a ´blueprint´ for the world, potentially containing encoded information about past and future events. This perspective aligns with broader Jewish hermeneutical traditions, as Carol Bakhos explains: ´Midrashic interpretation deploys a variety of exegetical techniques that are often tightly connected to the language of Scripture... In addition to word-play, rabbis occasionally use gematria, whereby the arithmetical value of Hebrew letters is used to interpret a word or verse´ (Bakhos, 2021, p. 292).

[13] Lyric from 'Beautiful Day'

The development of gematria as a spiritual practice can be traced to specific Jewish mystical movements: ´Gematria, although an ancient practice, may have been developed as a tool of mystical experience by the Ashkenazi Hasidim, and from there passed to Castilian Kabbalah in the thirteenth century´ (Miller, 2020, p.350). This trajectory illustrates how interpretive techniques evolved and spread across different Jewish communities and mystical traditions. Gematria can be applied to derive profound insights from Biblical and liturgical texts. These examples will illuminate the ways in which gematria serves not only as an exegetical tool but also as a bridge between the textual, the musical, and the mystical in Jewish tradition, despite some Hasidic rabbis cautioning against trying to find meaning in random words and connections, lest meanings be attributed that are not in accordance with Jewish *Halakah* and thinking.

Using an online Gematria generator gematrix.org shows when the words ‘beautiful day’ are written in Hebrew (יום יפה) then they have a numerical value of 151.

י	10
ו	6
ם	40
	0
י	10
פ	80
ה	5
=	**151**

Figure 2: Gematria of 'Beautiful Day'

Using this device and then reviewing Jewish writing about words with the value of 151 that have resonance with ´Beautiful Day´, suggests there is a concealed meaning in the song as the lyrics contain a form of judgement and can be seen as a lesson on dealing with the disappointments of the physical world. The significance of 151 is explained on Chabad.org:

´There are three types [and derivations] of vengeance [in Hebrew, "kina", whose numerical

value is 151]: the name Eh-yeh when spelled out with the letter hei, giving a numerical value of 151; the combined numerical values of the names Ado-nai and Elokim, which equal 151; and the square of the name Eh-yeh, which equals 151. All these equal the numerical value of the word for "anger" [in Hebrew, "ka'as"] plus 1 for the word as a whole. We see from this that anger derives from the two names Ado-nai and Elokim, which signify the two types of courts: lenient and strict. When these two names are combined, anger issues from them. In other words, being judgmental (i.e., acting like a court) is the source of anger.´

There is a sense of judgement and anger in ´Beautiful Day´ which can be interpreted as being directed at God. This reading aligns with the Jewish concept of wrestling with faith, as seen in the story of Jacob wrestling with the angel (Genesis 32:22-32). The lyric 'don't let it get away' can be understood as an exhortation not to let anger obscure the beauty of God's creation, even in the face of environmental exploitation, as exemplified by 'oil fields at first light' and 'the tuna fleets clearing the sea out'. The high-pitched melody and vocal delivery, particularly in live performances, encourage crowd participation, creating a communal experience arguably reminiscent of congregational prayer in Jewish tradition. However, when examined as prose, the lyrics reveal undertones of sadness or anger, reflecting the complex relationship between humanity and the divine.

Another example where Gematria can be applied is ´The Blackout´ (ה האפלה):

ה	5
	0
ה	5
א	1
פ	80
ל	30
ה	5
=	**126**

Figure 3: Gematria of 'The Blackout'

If the Gematria of ´The Blackout´ is 126, a starting point in finding Jewish meaning could be by referring to Psalm 126:

They who sow in tears
shall reap with songs of joy.

Though he goes along weeping,
carrying the seed-bag,
he shall come back with songs of joy,
carrying his sheaves.

Through surface-level textual analysis, the connection to Psalm 126 might not be immediately evident; however, delving into a Kabbalistic analysis of the lyrics in both 'The Blackout' and comparing them to the words of Psalm 126 reveals layers of hidden meaning. The initial verse of Psalm 126 שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת translates as 'song of ascents,' and as such this Psalm serves as a guidepost that even during difficult and sorrowful times, one should find joy in devotion to God, a similar theme to that of 'The Blackout'. The commentary of Scherman and Zoltowitz in *Tehillim* (2013) highlights how this Psalm signifies the pinnacle of ascension, portraying the Jewish nation's rise from the depths of exile. The composition of this Psalm by King David is seen as a prophetic vision of events far beyond his lifetime. In a similar vein, although not prophetic in the Jewish sense, Bono's lyrics describe the global state of affairs and US politics as existing in darkness, while advocating for celebration and predicting that growth and enlightenment stem from this dark condition.

A detailed study of Psalm 126 by Cohn-Zentner discusses the various melodies employed across the Jewish diaspora, with Cohn-Zentner suggesting that the melodies used to sing the Psalm serve not just as temporal indicators but, especially post-displacement, as reminders of place and liturgical moments in specific locations. Cohn-Zentner notes that following the Holocaust and the dispersal of those who understood the musical code of ´The Song of Ascents,´ there were only ´traces´ left of ´what once was an intricate musical system´ (Cohn-Zentner, 2019, pp. 223-254). When recited in modern post-1948 Israel, the text of ´The Song of Ascents´ evokes aspirations for redemption, set to melodies paradoxically echoing the memory of the exile experience of German Jews, and functioning as both a memorial to their lost ancestral home and a summoning of a distinct ritual period. This message is echoed in ´The Blackout´ with the lyric ‘When the lights go out / Don't you ever doubt / The light that we can really be’ is a modern invocation to keep believing in God, carrying themes of faith

and conviction and mirroring Psalm 126's aspiration for the restoration of Zion or, in a contemporary context, the restoration of global equilibrium.

These two examples show that in some instances using gematria can assist in revealing additional meanings and deeper layers to lyrics, however it is not a method that can be universally applied. Inputting the title of the song ´A Man and a Woman´ (directly translated into Hebrew as איש ואישה) into the gematria calculator gives a value of 633. It is then possible to add 6+3+3=13 then double to get 26, which correlates with Genesis 1:26 ´And God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness."´ The title ´A Man and a Woman´ has more relevance to Genesis 1:27 ´He created him; male and female He created them´, a correlation which could be found by applying alternative spelling and configuration, which shows the unreliability of finding a definitive connection to the Biblical text using this approach.

The Hasidic movement is a spiritual and mystical revival movement founded in mid-18th century Ukraine by Rabbi Yisrael ben Eliezer, known as the Ba'al Shem Tov (or the Besht, 1698–1750). Chasidut emphasises that all can access divinity, with teachings drawing on Kabbalah focusing on ideas like joy in religious practice, intention during prayer, attachment to God (´devekut´), and God's omnipresence in the material world. The Hasidic movement developed a style of singing known as ´niggun´, a form of prayer that emphasises the expression of spirituality using the voice[14]. A 'niggun' is a tune that can be sung alone or in groups and is typically sung without words, ´the ascent is often supported by a single musical motif steadily rising in pitch´. Hassidim will sing ´niggunim´, which are often simple repetitive phrases in a mix of Hebrew, Yiddish and other languages, in synagogue services, during times of joy and as an aid to communal prayer after festive meals and on the Sabbath. There is no age barrier to singing niggunim, which often incorporate lyrical improvisation using additional words and humming. Shiloah observes ´Hassidim draw distinctions among the major types of *niggunim*. The first and most important is the 'rabbi's *niggun*' in which the secrets of the kabbalah are revealed´. A 'stam' (plain) niggun is sung in unison by all present

[14] For a discussion of music and Kabbalah see Garb. J, and Berkovits-Murciano. Y, (2009) The Chosen Will Become Herds: Studies in Twentieth-Century Kabbalah, Yale University Press; and Garb, J. (2011). And Trance and the Nomian. In Shamanic Trance in Modern Kabbalah (pp. 119-142). Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://doi-org.virtual.anu.edu.au/10.7208/9780226282060-007. Further exploration of these sources do not fit within the scope of this thesis but are relevant in understanding how the relationship between Hasidim and music is understood.

and ′usually has a musical meter, that is a defined rhythm to make it easier for the public to sing′ (Shiloah, 1992, p. 197). Shiloah also notes that the ‘composers’ of the Hasidic niggunim rarely created entirely original works, but borrowed from a variety of other sources, mixing the ‘sacred and profane’ (p. 199). ′Musicologists see these efforts in Chabad’s rich musical repertoire of *nigunim* (religious melodies), and in music’s centrality to the group’s public observances and outreach projects.′ (Cohen and Dale, 2023, p 585).

According to Hasidic tradition, the idea of niggunim began with the Ba'al Shem Tov, who is credited with emphasising the importance of vocal music as a form of personal confession and spiritual expression. Garb's analysis of Hasidic mystical practice reveals how music functioned as a crucial element in achieving trance states and spiritual transformation. He notes that ′melodies (*nigunim*) and dance′ played essential roles ′in the creation of the ambience of Hasidic gatherings and the resultant collective trance experience′ (Garb, 2020, p. 132). This understanding aligns with his broader observation that Hasidic mystical experience was deeply embedded within communal and ritual frameworks rather than isolated individual practice. The temporal dimension was particularly significant, as Garb documents how ′the cyclical construction of sacred time through the yearly festivals and their accompanying mystical-liturgical order of kavvanot can be seen as a nomian system that facilitates trance states′ (p. 132). In this context, the wordless niggun represents what Garb identifies as part of the ′hypnotic technique′ that creates ′the timeline′ for movement through inner spiritual time demonstrating how Hasidic musical practice integrated mystical experience with traditional Jewish observance.

The way Bono uses words and music has some resonance with the teachings of The Ba’al Shem Tov and other Hasidim. His incorporation of Biblical words and themes, as well as the use of invented words and sounds that evoke emotion has a connection with Jewish traditions. Bono’s improvisation, for example on ′Pride (In the Name of Love)′ or the start of ′The Miracle of Joey Ramone′ when he hum-sings a melody rather than using words to convey a message can sound like a niggun as if he is reaching for a higher spiritual plane with a kind of prayer. This style of ′repetitive nonsense syllables (yi-yi-yi, bam-bam-bam, etc.) used to access a spiritual or prayerful state′ (Brautbar et al, 2020, p. 198) is also related to Rabbi Nachman, who influenced American folk and bluegrass artists such as Statman, who in turn have resonance with U2’s second era as can be heard on the song ′In God’s Country′ (*The Joshua Tree*) which ends with Bono singing, ′I stand with the sons of Cain, / Burned by

the fire of love… wo oh oh oh wo′. These parallels suggest that Bono's improvisational methods may unconsciously draw upon Jewish spiritual practices embedded within Western musical traditions, encompassing performative elements that echo Jewish approaches to transcendent musical experience.

3. Correlations between meaning of words used in the Bible and in U2 lyrics

My initial review of the catalogue of published U2 lyrics revealed that there are commonly repeated words that also appear in some form in the Hebrew Bible. The words tabled in ′Figure 5: List of song words′ appear 76 times in U2's songs according to the list of lyrics published on U2.com, the official band website. I undertook a rudimentary data analysis that started with cutting and pasting all the available lyrics from U2.com into a Word document. I deleted any lyrics that were not written by U2, i.e. covers of songs written by other artists. I then used this document to search for individual words and phrases to see how many times they occurred in the lyrics written by U2.

Spirit	**Soul**	**Knee/Kneel**	**Free/Freedom**
Bad	A Man And AWoman	Big Girls are Best	A Celebration
Levitate	Acrobat	California	Bad
Lucifer's Hands	Always	City Of Blinding Lights	Breathe (Mandela version)*
Mysterious Ways	American Soul	Falling at Your Feet	Even Better Than the Real Thing
So Cruel	Angel of Harlem	Hold Me Thrill Me Kiss Me	Get On Your Boots
Stay	Breathe	In A Little While	Get Out of Your Own Way*
The Wanderer	Cedarwood Rd	Love and Peace	Gone*
Three Sunrises	Crumbs from Your Table	Moment of Surrender	Levitate*
Waves of Sorrow	Elevation	Mysterious Ways	Miracle Drug*

Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses	Every Breaking Wave	Original of the Species	Moment of Surrender
Subtotal: 11	Hawkemoom 269	Please	New York*
	Invisible	Sleep Like A Baby	Pride
	Landlady	Vertigo	The Blackout
	Luminous Times	Waves of Sorrow	The Little Things That Give You Away*
	MOFO	When I Look at the World	Unknown Caller
	Moment of Surrender	Window in the Skies	Wake Up Dead Man
	Original of the Species	Zoo Station	Walk On*
	Sometimes You Can't Make…	**Subtotal: 18**	You're the Best Thing About Me
	Stand Up Comedy		**Subtotal: 19**
	The First Time		
	The Troubles (alt version only)		
	The Wanderer		
	Vertigo		
	Waves of Sorrow		**Total: 76**
	Window in the Skies		
	Wire		
	Yahweh		
	Sub Total: 28		

Figure 4:Songs containing spirit, soul, kneel(ing), free(dom)

NB: Colours are used to identify songs that use more than one of the words

The table ´Figure 5:Songs containing spirit, soul, kneel(ing), free(dom)´ lists the songs the relevant words appear in and how often they appear in U2's lyrics. I calculated that

´Spirit´ appears 11 times, ´soul´ 28 times, ´knee/kneel´ 11 times, and ´free/freedom´ 19 times. The four words are listed below with their Hebrew translations and transliteration (the English pronunciation):

Word used	**Hebrew Translation**	**Transliteration**
Spirit	רוּחַ	*ruach*
Soul	נֶפֶשׁ	*nefesh*
Kneel	כָּרְעוּ	*kar'u*
Freedom	חוֹפֶשׁ	*chofesh*

Figure 6: List of song words

This list of words provides a starting point for insight into how the Hebrew Bible is represented and expressed by U2 and further analysis of U2's music is also possible within this framework. The text of the Hebrew Bible has many layers and in Jewish tradition, the message is contained not simply in the words on the page but the context, translation, rabbinic interpretation, and visible and hidden intent of their use. So, it follows that the words listed are not always written exactly in the Hebrew Biblical text as they are in English, but are often merely alluded to. For example, in Psalms 20:9 some translations use 'bowed down' for כָּרְעוּ instead of kneel, however the intent of the word is made clear in Rabbinic literature. Analysis of popular songs can similarly be approached with varying levels of complexity. Allan Moore notes the 'aural experience' is vital to the analysis of popular song; that analysis and interpretation are distinct. ´To analyse a popular song is… to offer an interpretation of it, to determine what meaning it has.´ (Moore, 2016, p. 5).

I then compiled lists of songs that included the most commonly used words to see if there were musical and melodic similarities too. Angela Pancella in the chapter 'U2 and the Theist/Nontheist Dialogue', her contribution to Bloomsbury Academic's *U2 and the Religious Impulse: Take Me Higher* (2019), studied the word 'believe' in U2's catalogue, polling U2 fans and scholars for their views to trace Bono's lyrical use of the word. Unlike Pancella, rather using interviews with the existing U2 'community', I experimented with generating Wordcloud images and spreadsheets to identify resonant repeated words and combinations. By creating charts using these tools it was then possible to determine how often specific

words were used. For example, as will be shown in the next section, I used this method to identify how often ‘soul’ appears, and in which songs, and considering it in the context of various textual aspects of the song. Wordcloud was useful for highlighting the words used in a set of songs or an individual song, providing a graphic representation. (See Appendix 1 for illustrative examples of the Wordclouds I generated). As the interrelatedness of the words, ideas and particular songs to the Hebrew Bible is not simply one of lyric comparison, I also referred to the writing of Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1991 to 2013, to determine the significance and usage of these words and further support the case that the deployment of certain words and phrases infer connections between U2 to the Hebrew Bible. This methodological approach aligns with what Burns and Lacasse (2018) identify as examining 'a broader range of intertextual relationships in popular music' (Burns and Lacasse, 2018, p. 2) and reveals relationships between U2's music and the Hebrew Bible that extend beyond obvious references.

The following songs contain more than one of the four identified words (soul, spirit, free and kneel):

Song title	**Words used**	**Album**
′Bad′	Spirit/Free	*The Unforgettable Fire*
′Breathe’	Soul / Freedom	*No Line on the Horizon*
′Levitate′	Spirit / Freedom	*All That You Can’t Leave Behind (demo)*
′Original of the Species’	Soul / Knee(l)	*How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*
′Moment of Surrender’	Soul / Kneel /Free	*No Line on the Horizon*
′The Wanderer′	Spirit / Soul	*Achtung Baby*
′Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)’	Spirit/ Soul / Kneel	*The Joshua Tree Album Remastered (2007)*
′Window in the Skies’	Soul / Kneel	*Single only*

Figure 7: List of identified words that feature in lyrics of multiple U2 songs

Relevance of the words

1. Soul - נֶפֶשׁ (nefesh)

The first mention of soul in the Hebrew Bible is in Genesis 2:7: ´God formed the man of dust from the ground and he blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being´. However, the English translation of the Genesis 2:7 varies:

וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה׃ - the *Koren Jerusalem Bible* translating it as, ´And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living **soul**´ while the *JPS Tanakh* version is ´the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living **being**.´ The most commonly used Hebrew words that are used to describe the soul are ´nefesh´ (נֶפֶשׁ) and ´neshamah´ (נִשְׁמַת) both of which are translated as ´breath,´ because God breathed life into us. The differences are subtle but they are significant because of their reference as proof text. In his sermon 'The Three Stages of Creation' (2018, Beshallach) Rabbi Sacks notes that the proof that God gave humans a soul is that they can speak. Sacks says, ´Because we can speak, we can think, and therefore imagine a world different from the one that currently exists.´

This is significant as U2 uses 'soul' in 26 songs, the word first appearing in the lyrics for ´Wire´ the third track on the band's fourth album, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984). Produced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, ´Wire´ is an example of the importance of considering technical sound production and the style in which words are sung to construct meaning. ´Wire´ has layers of manipulated guitar sounds building before the drums and then vocals are introduced, giving the song its texture and intensity and adding to the intensity of the lyrics:

Cold these eyes, I can't believe it
Cold, this heart is slow
Heart is stone

Call me
Such a cold heart
Such a cold man
Watch you tear yourself apart

So lay me down
My soul to give.
So lay me down
The longest sleep
Oh, the longest sleep

′So lay me down′ is hymn-like, and ′the longest sleep′ is a metaphor for death. In the context of the personal experiences of the band members and their friends during this period, ′Wire′ is about drug abuse and overdose, but reference to the soul gives it deeper meaning and a direct link with the Hebrew Bible. The song echoes the children′s bedtime Christian prayer: ′Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep′. ′Wire′ is not often performed live, but a version on YouTube from 1985 filmed live at Meadowlands by the BBC Whistle Test showcases some differences to the recorded version from *The Unforgettable Fire* album. In the live version it is easier to make out the words and Bono makes a 'trilling' noise during the performance, while the dynamics of this particular performance illustrate its ferocity. In U2, the music is important to how the meanings are constructed. The complexity and distortion of the guitar on ′Wire′ make it difficult to distinguish the individual sounds in the recording and decode the lyrics in the original recorded version of this song, so it is the way Bono uses his voice that makes it emotionally resonant. Close listening reveals that the rhythm and rhyme employed in ′Wire′ are devices used in Psalms and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. U2's ′so lay me down / my soul to give′ uses the same structure and language as the Psalms, as can be demonstrated by Psalm 3:6 ′I lay me down, and I sleep; I awake, for the Lord sustaineth me′ and Ezekiel 18:4, ′Behold, all souls are mine′ referencing the protector and creator. By comparing the texts I found techniques such as rhyme structures, using two rhyming words within a line, rhyming couplets and other similar devices.

Apart from ′Wire′ and ′Luminous Times (Hold on to Love)′, the B side of the 1987 single, ′With or Without You′ U2 does not appear to use the term 'soul' explicitly until 2004, notably in songs from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*: ′Crumbs from Your Table′ (2004), referring to Bono's experience campaigning to raise money for Africa, ′Original of the Species′ (2004), written for The Edge's daughter Hollie, who is Bono's godchild, and ′Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own′ (2004), about Bono's relationship with his

father, Bob Hewson. These three songs are personal but while the lyrics weave a narrative, there exists a level of ambiguity in both their meaning and the musical composition that allows room for interpretation by the listener. Without knowledge of the backstory, individuals can ascribe meaning to the songs based on how the songs make them feel.

The use of 'soul' and the meaning of these three songs signals that they are personal. In all three instances the 'soul' is a thing belonging to a person, something that can be shared or given away, relating to the Jewish concept of the soul in which the human soul is made up of 10 levels; three that are intellectual and seven emotional. The three intellectual levels are known as 'chochma', 'binah' and 'daas', while the remaining seven levels are levels of emotion and the main three of these are ´chesed´ (kindness), ´gevurah´ (strictness) and ´tiferes´ (compassion/perfection). According to the Ba'al Shem Tov's mystical teachings on the weekly Torah portion (translation by Rabbi E. Shore, sefaria.org) these 10 levels of the soul are called the 10 *sefiros* and exist because they mirror 10 levels in Godliness.

Christian scholars such as Stephen Harmon refer to U2 as prophets. Harmon uses Walther Eichrod's observation that the role of a Hebrew prophet is to articulate how God's purposes for the world intersect with our daily lives. Harmon says theologians who work in churches or academic institutions are expected to express 'prophetic insights' whereas a rock band does not have this role, and therefore their prophetic vision is unexpected. He also described the four members of U2 as 'Christian believers', noting ´In their music they imagine, through their glimpses of the divine reality, a world that might be. Several recurring themes mark the band's imagination as distinctively Christian.´ (Harmon, 2006, p. 81). Harmon's use of the Hebrew idea of prophecy to claim U2 as Christian prophets highlights the difference between Jewish and Christian understanding of prophets, as according to Jewish law, prophecy cannot be experienced outside of Israel. This delineation is significant in assessing U2 and Bono's vision as it underscores the context in which prophetic figures historically emerged and operated.

While Bono's commitment to humanitarian causes and justice agencies suggests qualities befitting a prophet, Deuteronomy 13:2-6, a foundational scriptural text, offers guidance on discerning true prophets from false ones, explicitly stating that if even if a so-called prophet performs signs or portents that come true, if that prophet advocates worshipping 'other' gods, they are to be rejected. This principle signifies that prophecy is not solely contingent upon

predictive accuracy but is intrinsically linked to adherence to Jewish belief and a genuine connection with the divine. Moreover, a prophet is traditionally seen as a harbinger of Messianic times, serving as a conduit for the divine message and ushering in an era of spiritual redemption. Bono's artistic expressions and philanthropic endeavours have resonance with aspects of prophetic discourse, however they do not inherently fulfil the Messianic requirement of prophethood within the framework of the Hebrew Bible. The scriptural injunctions and historical context surrounding prophecy in Jewish and Christian traditions necessitate a nuanced evaluation of prophetic claims, requiring careful consideration of the criteria and purpose of prophethood within these faiths.

U2's words do have resonance with the Hebrew prophets who chastised the un-Godly. Lyrics from ´Crumbs From Your Table´ can be interpreted as a critique of organised religion, 'From the brightest star / Comes the blackest hole / You had so much to offer / Why did you offer your soul?' suggesting a disdain for the spiritual apathy that accompanies adherence to dogma without a genuine pursuit of a higher calling. Isaiah 58:9-10 ´Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the pointing of the finger, and speaking iniquity; and if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in darkness, and thy gloom be as the noonday´, referenced in Midrash Tehillim 41.

Harmon (2006, p. 87) uses ´Crumbs from Your Table´ to illustrate his argument that Bono and U2 are ´unexpected prophets´. Harmon asserts this song and others see U2 ´cry out against injustice, but also dare to imagine an alternative in light of the Christian vision. They searchingly examine the distortions of our world´. U2 and Bono, in this sense, may be viewed as calling out those false prophets who claim to represent divine truth while prioritising materialistic and self-serving interests, however the song itself is not prophetic. In an interview for *Q Magazine* in November 2004, Bono said, ´I went to speak to Christian fundamentalist groups in America to convince them to give money to fight AIDS in Africa. It was like getting blood from a stone. I told them about a hospice in Uganda where so many people were dying they had to sleep three to a bed. Sister Anne, who I mention in the song, works at that hospice. Her office is a sewer.´

Referring to the 'soul' when questioning another individual is said to be a form of judgement, or in a kinder sense it can be used as a means of calling on the other person to act

(also Elevation: ‘elevate my soul’). In ´Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own´ in which Bono writes about his father, Bob Hewson, ´We fight all the time / You and I, that's alright / We're the same soul´, reinforcing the concept of a ‘soul’ as being a reflection of an individual’s innate behaviour. Without the background context ´Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own´ can be heard as being about any relationship, but the insight into who it was written for and about allows for meaning to be attributed to create a more nuanced appreciation. By ascribing meaning to words according to how and when they are used it can be concluded that U2 intentionally uses more explicitly Biblical and spiritual terms in the post-1990 eras, where they are clearly less guarded about expressing their faith and using terms that they might not have previously been comfortable with. In these songs the word ‘soul’ is used as a way of framing mortality, and a mature understating of the human condition and the acceptance of the soul as part of existence.

2. Freedom - חוֹפֶשׁ (chofesh)

The word ‘Freedom’ is used in the lyrics of seven U2 songs and ‘free’ in 10. It is never used in a title, never a repeated refrain or chorus, and is not ever the explicit theme within a song, even when Bono says in interviews it is about freeing Nelson Mandela or Aung San Suu Kyi.

Songs with 'Freedom' in lyrics:	**Songs with 'Free' in lyrics:**
´Walk On´, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000)	´A Celebration´, (1982)
´Breathe´, (Mandela version) (2013)	´Bad´, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984)
´Get Out of Your Own Way´, *Songs of Experience* (2017)	´Even Better Than the Real Thing´, *Achtung Baby* (1991)
´Gone´, *Pop* (1997)	´Get On Your Boots´, *No Line on the Horizo*n (2009)
´Miracle Drug´, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004)	´Moment of Surrender´, *No Line on the Horizon* (2009)

´New York´, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000)	´Pride (In the Name of Love)´, *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984)
´The Little Things That Give You Away´, *Songs of Experience* (2017)	´The Blackout´, *Songs of Experience* (2017)
	´Unknown Caller´, *No Line on the Horizo*n (2009)
	´Wake Up Dead Man´, *Pop* (1997)
	´You're the Best Thing About Me´, *Songs of Experience* (2017)

Figure 8: Songs with 'freedom' and/or 'free' in the lyrics

The first time U2 uses the word ´free´ in a recorded song is on the single ´A Celebration´ (1982), which has never been included on any album. The video for ´A Celebration´ was filmed at Kilmainham Gaol where Irish political prisoners were kept, their freedoms taken away:

I believe in a celebration
I believe we can be free.
//
I believe in the bells of Christchurch
Ringing for this land.
I believe in the cells of Mountjoy
There's an honest man.

And you can go there too, etc.

I believe in the walls of Jericho
I believe they're coming down.
I believe in this city's children
I believe the trumpet's sound.

And you can go there too, etc.

Even though the word ‘free’ is not repeated, the implicit theme of ´A Celebration´ is freedom. The references to places are all linked to the theme of freedom: the bells of Christchurch likely refers to Christ Church Cathedral, more formally known as The Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, which is claimed by both the Anglican Church of Ireland and Roman Catholic archbishops of Dublin, even though it is only used by the Church of Ireland.[15] Bono, having been brought up in a mixed household where one parent was Catholic and one was Protestant would have been aware that being able to pray in either Church, or ring the bells, was a freedom not afforded to previous generations.

Mountjoy Prison is similarly located in central Dublin, the 1923 hunger strikes began there and some Irish leaders involved with the Irish War of Independence and Irish Civil War were held there, making it strongly associated with the campaign for Irish freedom from British rule. The third reference to a place is Jericho, where God told Moses that he had failed to uphold God’s ´sanctity among the Israelite people´ and therefore would not enter the land. ´You may view the land from a distance, but you shall not enter it—the land that I am giving to the Israelite people.´ (Deuteronomy 32:52). Jericho is also referenced in Joshua, where the walls are blown down by trumpets, the most powerful sonic event in the Hebrew Bible, this lyrical reference inferring U2’s strong belief in God and the Hebrew Bible.

There are various interpretations of freedom in Judaism, depending on the sub-denomination and the application. Orthodox Rabbinic authorities state the most important thing is free will and the freedom or ability to choose to follow sacred practice. Rabbi Sacks elucidates that the modern Hebrew word for freedom (חרות / ‘cherut’) doesn’t exist in the Bible, instead ‘chofshi’ is the term used in the Hebrew Bible referring to the concept of ´collective freedom´, which is the willingness of the Jewish people to accept the laws of God. This Hebrew idea of freedom is not physical or spiritual freedom in the way it is understood in Western Christian thought, but as described by Rabbi Sacks, the freedom to choose to follow God, and to accept God’s laws. This is represented in the story of Moses and the

[15] For current and historical information about Christchurch Cathedral see https://christchurchcathedral.ie/about/history/ and https://www.fourcourtspress.ie/books/archives/christ-church-cathedral-dublin

exodus from slavery in Egypt (Exodus) which is told every year by Jews commemorating the Passover. The name of the festival refers to when the Angel of the Lord ‘passed over’ the homes of the Jews and struck down the firstborn of their oppressors, and therefore it is seen intrinsically as a story of freedom. This analysis of 'freedom' in U2's lyrics demonstrates how the band's usage aligns with the Hebrew Bible's conception of freedom as a spiritual rather than merely physical state.

The lyrics for ′Bad′ from *The Unforgettable Fire* album (Era Two) include the words free and spirit. ′Bad′ was produced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois and recorded at Slane Castle in Ireland and like *War*’s ’40’ (*War*, 1983) the lyrics were written last. Larry Mullen Junior reflects on recording the *Unforgettable Fire*: ′We depended on Bono to be there, every step of the way. He had to be singing something, anything to get the song finished… By the time we had finished the songs, he was scrambling to get the words together.′ (Bono et al, 2006, pp. 191-192). The song ′Bad′ was written for Bono’s childhood friend Andy Rowan who was addicted to drugs for most of his adult life, and alludes to an incident when Rowan overdosed on heroin. In the Jewish tradition having free will is said to be a ′blessing and curse′ (Deuteronomy 11:26-16:17), as it is possible for individuals to make ‘bad’ choices. Chabad Judaism argues ′The Chassidic masters speak of two distinct souls that vitalize the human being: an ‘Animal Soul’ and a ‘G-dly Soul.’ The Animal Soul is driven by the quest for self-preservation and self-enhancement; in this, it resembles the soul and self of all other creations. But we also possess a “G-dly Soul"—a soul driven by the desire to reconnect with its Source. Our lives are the story of the contest and interplay between these two souls, as we struggle to balance and reconcile our physical needs and desires with our spiritual aspirations.′ (Tauber, n.d). This interpretation aligns with the name of the song ′Bad′ and relates the lyric ‘set your spirit free’ with the need for faith and rescue, which are recurrent themes in Jewish eschatology.

If I could through myself
Set your spirit free, I'd lead your heart away
See you break, break away
Into the light
And to the day

3. Spirit - רוּחַ (ruach)

Bono says the influence of the Charismatic Renewal movement in Dublin in the late 70s had him and his 'art gang' friends on their guard (Bono, 2022, p. 137), shying away from extroverted encounters with the Holy Spirit in favour of finding spirituality through the prayer group Shalom and the 'countercultural life' lived by its leaders. The Hebrew word for 'spirit', transliterated as 'ruach' has been appropriated by Christian evangelical ministries who define it as being the 'holy spirit', but in Judaism 'spirit' refers to types of angels, and a 'holy spirit' is not a person, but a way of being. Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) a leading rabbi of this century who published a comprehensive translation of and commentary on the Talmud says of a prophet: ´If a person is of excellent mind and character, separates himself from the behaviour of the masses, and attaches his mind to the Holy One, blessed be He, a spirit of holiness rests upon him.´

A basic Kabbalistic introduction to the way of thinking about the spirit relates it to the soul, as Chabad Rabbi, Sholom B. Lipskar argues, ´According to tradition, every Jew is operated by two general souls. The first is the animal soul or life force that drives the base aspect of the person. The soul is further subdivided into five segments, each serving as the power source for the various aspects and functions of the person. Generally, the two souls function through the mechanism of thought, speech, and action: The *Nefesh* is the basic life force that vivifies physical existence. It is related to the blood…The *Ruach* is the operating system of our emotions. The *Neshama* drives our intellect. *Chaya* is the foundation of our wills and desires. *Yechida* is the connection to the essence of all life and being.´ The styling of the lyrics of ´Bad´ indicates the individual has a choice '**if you** twist and turn', and the title implies there is something wrong with the individual. In Judaism the spirit is not 'bad', meaning the individual can use their free will to choose their spiritual path, no matter what their physical circumstances.

In the lyrics for ´Mysterious Ways´ (*Achtung Baby,* 1991) the 'spirit' moves. Bono has commented on ´Mysterious Ways´ saying ´She moves in mysterious ways. It's a beautiful idea. The Spirit moves in mysterious ways. In the scriptures—in the Hebrew scriptures—the Spirit is not denominated to have any sex. And occasionally, you have a sense that it's female. The Spirit on the water, there's a new Spirit of creation. It's got to be female. It's just our attempt at making sacred the way we relate to our lovers.´ (Bono, U2SiriusX Radio, 2020) This relates to the 'ruach' described by Rabbi Lipskar above, in that it operates our emotions

and the instinctive reaction to matters of the heart. This reading of ‘spirit’ can also be applied to the use of ‘spirit’ in ´So Cruel´ which is commonly understood to have been written about The Edge’s breakup with his first wife Aislinn O'Sullivan. Stokes (2005, p. 101) says it is ´the desolate complaint of a lover who has been spurned but who remains in love with his tormentor.´

The men who love you, you hate the most
They pass right through you like a ghost.
They look for you, but **your spirit is in the air.**
Baby, you're nowhere.

The lyrical composition of ´So Cruel´ (*Achtung Baby*) demonstrates a multifaceted engagement with spiritual and emotional themes, drawing inspiration from the poetic and thematic undertones inherent in Leonard Cohen's works, particularly his aptly described ´subversive´ approach. According to Lebold (2018), Cohen's subversiveness manifests in his deliberate blurring of boundaries between his love for women and his love for God. He sought to conjoin the spiritual and the erotic, transforming theology into an erotic science and imbuing erotic experimentation with theological inquiry. Cohen's method involved interweaving fragments of prayer with declarations of desire within the same textual space, exemplified in works such as ´Hallelujah,´ where a singular modulation of voice can seamlessly transition from eros (love as sexual desire) to agape (spiritual love).

In ´So Cruel,´ the phrase ‘the men who love you, you hate the most’ evokes a sense of paradoxical emotion, resonating with Cohen's exploration of intertwined and conflicted emotions. The imagery of these figures passing through like ghosts suggests an ethereal and elusive nature, perhaps reflective of the transient and intangible aspects of both human and divine love. The lyrics further articulate a search for an elusive presence, with the spirit being omnipresent in the air, yet the subject, the ‘baby’ remains nowhere. This enigmatic portrayal mirrors Cohen's fusion of the spiritual and the erotic, where the search for love becomes intertwined with a quest for transcendence.

The parallels between ´So Cruel´ and ´Mysterious Ways´ underscore U2's thematic consistency, drawing from the subversive narrative style pioneered by Cohen. The incorporation of fragments of prayer and linking these to desire aligns with Cohen's method,

reflecting a deliberate intention to traverse the fine line between the sensual and the sacred. This interplay of themes within the lyrics of ′So Cruel′ extends beyond the expression of romantic angst, emerging as a nuanced exploration of the spiritual and erotic dimensions, echoing the legacy of Cohen's approach to the convergence of love and divinity in artistic expression. The use of ′baby′ in the lyrics of ′So Cruel′ implies that the song is not addressed to God but to a lover, but there is also a sense of disillusionment and regret that relate just as well to the loss of love as the loss of faith, the reference to the spirit and God acknowledging the influence of a higher power on the song's protagonist.

Another meaning for רוּחַ is wind. In ′Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses′ the lyric ′The wind calls your name′, is not immediately holy. However, Ramban says, ′The reason why ruach (wind) is attached to the name of G-d [as it says, and the spirit of God] is that it is the least substantial of all elements and is above them, hovering upon the face of the waters only by command of the Holy One, blessed be He.′ (Ramban on Genesis 1:1, 1971-1976). Applying a Jewish lens to analysing the verse it becomes an invitation to believe in the spirit and follow God: ′To a place where the wind calls your name / Under the trees, the river laughing at you and me / Hallelujah! Heaven's white rose / The doors you open I just can't close / Don't turn around′. As previously explained, ′Hallelujah′ means praise and is a direct intertextual reference from the Hebrew Bible. In this context, when coupled with the phrase ′heaven's white rose′ the word ′Hallelujah′ is revealed as also being related to a Kabbalistic text describing the rose from *Song of Songs 2:2* as the 'Congregation of Israel'—the red petals of the rose represent 'judgment' and the white petals represent 'mercy'. Reading this verse and applying a lens of Jewish mysticism gives it additional depth, seeing the first two lines as a recognition that the elements—the wind, the trees and the river—are created by God, and then the second two lines containing a coded plea that God not to turn away but be merciful because he opened the door by giving humans free will. Mercy is another recurrent motif in U2's lyrics and Jewish thought making this reference to 'heaven's white rose' particularly poignant.

4. Kneel - כָּרְעוּ (kar'u)

כָּרַע *(v) heb*
to bend, kneel, bow, bow down, sink down to one's knees, kneel down to rest (of animals), kneel in reverence (Qal) to bow

to bow down, crouch
to bow down over
to tilt, lean
(Hiphil) to cause to bow
(Sefaria.org)

Kneeling is the physical expression of submission. In the Jewish tradition ‘to kneel’ while praying is to bend at the knees while standing, not balance upright with the knees on the floor as it is practised in Islam, Christianity and other religions. There is a proscribed difference between kneeling and bowing as instructed during the recitation of ´Aleinu´ (Eisenberg, 2004, p. 467), when congregants bow while saying ´va-anachnu korim´ (we bend the knee). However, kneeling is seen as deeply spiritual, as an action of Moses in Exodus 34: ´Moses hastened to kneel upon the ground and worshipped, and said: “If now I have found favour in Your eyes, O Master, let the Divine Presence dwell among us. This is an obstinate people but through Your attributes of Mercy, pardon our iniquities and sins, and make us Your unique possession." Rashi said “וימהר משה which translates as “And Moses made haste” means “When Moses saw that the Shechinah passed by and heard the sound of the proclamation he immediately prostrated himself.”´

One of the most pointed moments in the *Megillat Esther* (the *Book of Esther*), the book recited annually on the festival of Purim, is when Mordechai refuses to kneel before the Persian king’s representative, Haman, as he will only kneel before God. This act sets in train a series of events that eventually leads to the triumph of the Jewish people. Kneeling is a recurrent reference in the lyrics of U2, with 'kneel' or 'knee' found in the songs ´Zoo Station´, ´Original of the Species´, ´Vertigo´, ´California´, ´In A Little While´, ´Love and Peace or Else´, ´Mysterious Ways´, ´When I Look at the World´, ´Moment of Surrender´, ´Please´ and ´Window in the Skies´. Altogether, I identified 16 U2 songs that include lyrics about kneeling, with four songs using both soul and kneel: ´Original of the Species´ (2004), ´Moment of Surrender´ (2009), ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´ and the single-only release, ´Window in the Skies´ (2006). None of the songs that contain the word knee or kneel is from so-called Christian-inspired *The Joshua Tree* or earlier albums, indicating that U2's incorporation of Biblical impulses and motifs became more pronounced in their later work, after 1989. In ´City of Blinding Light´ Bono sings, ‘Blessings not just for the ones who kneel. Luckily’ implying that kneeling is seen as requisite in some faiths, but not all faiths, and all

individuals can receive blessings whether they conform to the rules of religion or not.

′Moment Of Surrender′ (*No Line On the Horizon*, 2009) has many of the characteristics of the Psalms, employing techniques typical of the Psalmist including five lines that begin with 'to', and describing the action of 'folding to my knees' at the 'moment of surrender' as being an out-of-body experience, (′I did not notice the passers-by′) suggesting a connection with a higher power:

At the moment of surrender
I folded to my knees
I did not notice the passers-by
And they did not notice me…
I've been in every black hole
At the altar of the dark star
My body's now a begging bowl
That's begging to get back, begging to get back
To my heart
To the rhythm of my soul
(—′Moment Of Surrender′)

In Psalm 20 the word כָּרְעוּ is translated as 'bowed down' with כָּרְעוּ is included in the *Siddur Ashkenaz*, ′Weekday, Shacharit, Concluding Prayers, Lamenatze'ach 2′. According to Rabbi S.R. Hirsch (sefaria.org), this Psalm is addressed to David by the people of Israel. ′It is a testimonial of trust that the people have in the Divinely-appointed king, who is accustomed to victory and triumph. At the same time, it proclaims the eternal truth that the victories which our king wins for our people are to be attributed not to his bravery, nor to his sword, nor to his soldiers, but solely to his relationship with God, His Sanctuary, and His Law.′

The 'black hole' in ′Moment of Surrender′ relates to Psalm 22:30, which King David is said to have written foretelling the dark times of the Babylonian and Persian exiles: ′All those in full vigour shall eat and prostrate themselves; all those at death's door, whose spirits flag, shall bend the knee before Him.′ Rashi's commentary Psalm 22.30.03 is insightful: ′before Him shall...kneel′ Then all the dead of nations [will kneel] from Gehinnom but He will not have mercy upon them to revive their souls from Gehinnom.′ (Rashi, n.d., sefaria.org)

Gehinnom is not ‘hell’ but purgatory, which is ´the spiritual realm in which the souls are cleansed from the blemishes brought about by their conduct while on Earth´. It is not a place of eternal damnation as understood by Christians, as in Judaism there is always a way ‘up’, and it is said that those souls who are sent to Gehinnom are only there for a year, until the annual anniversary of their descent, known as the *yatzheit*. Other Psalms that refer to kneeling are Psalms: 20:9 translated by the Sefaria.org Community as ‘They kneel and fall, but we rise and gain strength’ (or as the JPS translates ‘they collapse and lie fallen’) and Psalm 95 (JPS 1985 translation) ‘Come, let us bow down and kneel, bend the knee before the Lord our maker’. In both instances the psalmist is indicating the physical and spiritual expression of submission or surrender.

Psalm 20:7-10 (Hebrew)	*JPS Tanach* (1985)	*Koren Jerusalem Bible*
עַתָּה יָדַעְתִּי כִּי הוֹשִׁיעַ ׀ יְהוָה מְשִׁיחוֹ יַעֲנֵהוּ מִשְׁמֵי קָדְשׁוֹ בִּגְבוּרוֹת יֶשַׁע יְמִינוֹ׃ אֵלֶּה בָרֶכֶב וְאֵלֶּה בַסּוּסִים וַאֲנַחְנוּ ׀ בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נַזְכִּיר׃ הֵמָּה כָּרְעוּ וְנָפָלוּ וַאֲנַחְנוּ קַמְנוּ וַנִּתְעוֹדָד׃	Now I know that the LORD will give victory to His anointed, will answer him from His heavenly sanctuary with the mighty victories of His right arm. They [call] on chariots, they [call] on horses, but we call on the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and lie fallen, but we rally and gather strength. O LORD, grant victory! May the King answer us when we call.	Now I know that the Lord saves his anointed; that he answers him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will make mention of the name of the Lord our God. They are bowed down and fallen: but we are risen, and stand upright. Save, Lord; O King, who hears us on the day when we call.

Figure 9: Translations of Psalm 20:7

This device of using the physical act of kneeling to signal surrender is used by Bono in live performance. Although there is no reference to kneeling in the lyrics of any song on *The Joshua Tree*, during the highly choreographed Joshua Tree 30th Anniversary Tour shows, Bono went down on his knees before the opening bars of ´Mothers of The Disappeared´, with his head bent and eyes cast downwards and then, as a spotlight shone on him, lifting his head up. The kneeling pose demonstrates resignation and in the context of the performance of the entire *Joshua Tree* album, with its Biblical tone and expression, has connotations of a physical and spiritual dark place, from which the performer is yet to be lifted up. It is a representation of the need for godliness in the world and signals that Bono has yet to find a resolution to the horrors he experienced while in Central America (Bono, 2022, p. 193).

In the lyrics of ´When I Look At the World´ (*All That You Can't Leave Behind*, 2000) the concept of kneeling can be seen as both an indicator of despair and distress, and as a suggestion of reaching out to God. Although the title is, ´When I Look At the World´ the lyrics are a question directed at another; in this case it could be God, or world leaders, or any listener: ´When you look at the world / What is it that you see / People find all kinds of things / That bring them to their knees´. The song darkly refers to the 'holy book', and this context 'while the rest of us choke' suggests that the 'holy book' is used a smokescreen for people to hide behind: ´I'm in the waiting room / I can't see for the smoke / I think of you and your holy book / When the rest of us choke´.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Jewish interpretive approaches reveal additional layers of meaning in U2's work that extend beyond existing Christian-focused analyses. The exploration of key Biblical concepts including soul, freedom, spirit and kneeling demonstrates the significant influence of Hebrew thought throughout U2's lyrics, regardless of whether this influence was conscious or unconscious. The analysis of songs such as 'Beautiful Day' and 'The Blackout' through Jewish mystical traditions like gematria uncovers connections to specific Psalms that might otherwise remain hidden. This approach to interpreting contemporary popular music contributes to a deeper understanding of how ancient religious texts continue to shape modern artistic expression. The multiple meanings present in U2's lyrics allow for various interpretive traditions to exist simultaneously,

reflecting the textual complexity found in both the Hebrew Bible and meaningful songwriting.

CHAPTER 5: Explicit Biblical References

Within U2's oeuvre there are explicit and implicit references to the Hebrew Bible. In lyrics there are direct textual quotations, some of which I have identified and explore in this chapter. As U2 has a vast catalogue and there are multiple versions of many songs, choosing case studies was a complex task. After listening to the entire U2 catalogue on Spotify twice, I identified songs that had intertextual Biblical references and had been examined from a Christian point of view and warranted further interpretation and the application of a Jewish perspective, narrowing the selection to six songs. These songs contain explicit biblical references in their lyrics and have previously been analysed by scholars, who identify as Christian, as an aspect of their research: ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´, ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´, ´Love Rescue Me´, ´Moment of Surrender´ and ´13 (There is a Light)´.

I then examined the words of these songs to find any Biblical inference or language. I then workshopped ideas about the connection between the music of the Hebrew Temple era and the Hebrew Bible and U2's songs with one of my supervisors, Professor Kim Cunio over two sessions, with the intention of finding musical similarities between the two; however it was not possible to make a definitive causal link between the music of U2 and the Temple era using this methodology. The primary finding from this process was that in these songs, and much of U2's recording catalogue, there are significant examples of intertextuality in musical styles and influences that have commonality with practice by Jewish liturgical songwriters throughout the ages.

Allan Moore says, ´It is a basic factor of human perception that we transfer meaning in one domain to another, a notion that is recognised within what I have characterised as *embodied cognition* as *cross-domain mapping´* (Moore, 2016, p. 14). I sought to develop a type of cross-domain mapping by comparing the characteristics of U2 songs with historical Jewish tunes. Workshopping ideas about a methodology with Professor Kim Cunio, an expert in traditional Jewish music, afforded an opportunity to explore the connection between the music of U2 and the music of the Hebrew Temple from the First Temple period (701 BCE)

and the Second Temple period (586 BCE–CE 70), collectively known as the Temple Era. The time of the Second Temple is further divided into the following periods: Persian (586–332 BCE); Hellenistic (332–63 BCE); and Roman (63 BCE–CE 324). The intention was to find musical similarities between those songs and the music of the Hebrew Temple in melodies, instrument arrangement, vocal patterns and how words are used. This approach was useful for then being able to find Jewish tunes with similar melodies; however it was not possible to make a definitive causal link between the music of U2 and the time of the Hebrew Temple using this methodology, as scholars have not been able to convincingly recreate the music of the era using archaeological and Biblical information.

The analysis of U2 songs in this thesis follows popular music methodologies that use the recorded song as the text and also reference the context and the experience of the listener and the performer. I have primarily focused on examining the lyrics, however the context of the combination and style of words used in song lyrics is significant. Lyrics can take on a different meaning according to how the listener, or reader, understands U2's history, and the referencing of the melodies, instruments, the vocal persona and how the songs change in live performance, often because of the location or date. In U2's catalogue there is an intertwining of musical styles and influences, often influenced by where and when the song was written and recorded, and the external influences on the members on the band and their producers. This is something U2 have in common with Jewish liturgical songwriters over the ages who were influenced by the Bible, the place where they performed and the found sounds and other influences from those countries, including Spain, Syria, Iraq, Germany and France. Projects undertaken by the Jewish Music Research Centre of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem under the direction of Professor Edwin Seroussi and Project Manager, Dr. Joseph Sprinzak, include mapping the songs of the Jewish diaspora and showing the diversity of influences and the nuanced differences in the melodies and music used by Jewish religious and secular musicians in dispersed communities.

This research establishes the primary connection between U2 and the music of the Hebrew Bible is in the use of the Psalms. Dean Galbraith notes references to the Psalms in ′40′, ′Gloria′ (Psalms 30, 32, and 50); ′Love Rescue Me′ (Psalm 23); and ′Wake Up Dead Man′ (Psalm 44), saying ′Few of these allusions are explicit, and most will go right over the heads of a large sector of U2's audience. However, it is, I contend, this very suggestive and open-ended form of U2's lyrical and musical allusions that opens up the seductive element of

U2's music. It is not so much the lyrical content of this veiled communication as it is the evocative extra-semantic musical elements that create for a sector of U2's audience a spiritual or religious dimension to their music´ (Galbraith, 2014, p. 123).

Incorporating fragments of Psalms is an ancient Jewish tradition, and in the modern era can be found in music used in communal rituals and prayer services, and has also been used by Jewish songwriters such as Leonard Cohen and others. Locating the intertextual references to the Hebrew text to ascribe a spiritual meaning is a method that does not apply to all U2 songs, as many of their songs contain no lyrics that have any connection with the Hebrew Bible. The validity and importance of this type of analysis is that it demonstrates the influence of the Bible in many aspects of modern popular culture is both explicit and unintentional because scriptural references are so embedded in our society and language that the source is often obscured.

The elements from church or communal worship that may be present and have influenced U2's music include key tone, psalmody, harmony, repetition, and responsive prayer. In my previous writing in *U2 and the Religious Impulse* I found there were themes of refuge, rejoicing, mercy, forgiveness and speaking to God that relate well to the Hebrew Bible. Religious imagery and illusion are not always foregrounded in songs that are widely viewed as being 'spiritual' for example ´Where the Streets Have No Name´, ´Bad´ and ´Miracle Drug´. The rabbis and sages have studied the stories of the Torah and decoded the inner metaphysical meaning over the last 3,000 years to add to the literal interpretation. U2's canon relates to the Hebrew Bible in that the lyrics run the full gamut of the human condition and experience, and it can be said that through his words and actions Bono strives to set a moral but realistic guide to dealing with life.

Another aspect I have taken into consideration is the translation of the Christian versions of the Psalms, such as those likely read by the members of U2, are translations not from Hebrew, but English via Greek. The introduction to the Psalms written by Bono and his endorsement of Eugene Peterson's *The Message* confirm his own knowledge of the Hebrew Bible is through translation. There are pitfalls in relying on translated versions of Hebrew texts as the words can be taken out of context, or the meaning of the original text obscured or reinterpreted. Orthodox Jewish scholarship states that the Torah can only be properly understood through the writings of the Rabbis and the meanings passed down through the

oral Jewish tradition.

Bono has spoken about the significance of Eugene Peterson's *The Message* and its influence on U2, saying ´There've been some great translations, some very literary translations but no translation that speaks to me in my own language.´ (Taylor, 2016, 0.34) Given Bono's predilection for writing biblically inspired lyrics, his endorsement of a version of the Bible that uses common language indicates he is comfortable with changing the words of the Bible in order to make it relatable to a broad audience. However, a literary translation of the Psalms is just that: it is not a religious text as such, as 'literary' translations lose the intent and context of the Psalm and do not consider the Midrash, therefore Rabbinical authorities such as Rashi explicitly caution against such readings. However, the Christian characters of the New Testament often quote or refer to the Psalms, so this type of intertextuality has many layers. Galbraith asserts ´Most readings of an allusion in a U2 song will tend to be "tendentious", either construing a U2 song centrifugally, as a response to a biblical text, or centripetally, interpreting the biblical text as receiving its elucidation within the U2 song. The primary direction of interpretation will depend first and foremost on whether the reader/listener considers the Bible or U2 to be the more authoritative source´ (Galbraith, 2011, p. 204).

A traditional Western classical musicological style of analysis can be useful when deconstructing popular song to understand how to score or play it, however it does little to amplify the meaning or how it is heard. Knowing the context, that is: who wrote the song, when, why and what the intended meaning is, gives much greater depth to the piece and its position as a work of significance.

1: 'With A Shout (Jerusalem)' (*October)*

As noted in Chapter 3, ´With a Shout (Jerusalem)´ explicitly refers to Jerusalem, Israel in the title and by using the word 'Jerusalem' throughout the song, is an evocation of the Hebrew Bible. Coupled with the lyric, 'with a shout' the words and music create a sense of 'going up', an elevation or a celebration, even though the tone of voice of the singer is at times mournful, with an implicit feeling of longing. There are multiple portions of the Tanakh that could relate to the lyrics of this song. It is worth noting that at this point in U2's history none of the band members had been to Israel and their frame of reference is through

their Christian study of the Bible. In Chapter 3, I reference Lamentations and write that the lyrics evoke images of sectarian violence: the spilling of blood at the foot of Mount Zion in Biblical Israel compares with the Troubles in Northern Ireland which was the prevailing narrative in Ireland at the time the album *October* was written. This is an early version of U2's worldview that recognises the significance of the Bible to a wide audience, and is later expressed in the lyrics for ´Love and Peace or Else´ 2004's *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* as Bono refers to all the 'All you daughters of Zion, All you Abraham sons'.

Specific elements of this song can also be associated with sounds of the Temple era and historic Jewish use of the words of the Tanakh and the music described in the Bible. The guitars are foregrounded which Angela Pancella says brings the song into the realm of Psalm 47 which mentions trumpets and the shofar: Psalm 47:5 'God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet' (Pancella and Neufeld, 2017).[16] However, the sound of a shofar is not a 'shout', and in the JPS Tanakh translation, the reference to the trumpet is in 47:6 'עָלָה אֱלֹהִים בִּתְרוּעָה יְהוָה בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר:' and is translated as: ´God ascends midst acclamation; the LORD, to the blasts of the horn´; the *Koren Jerusalem Bible* translates it as 'God is gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a shofar.' The shofar, a trumpet made out of a ram's horn, is one instrument that can be definitively placed in the Temple Era. It is referred to 101 times in Tanach (sefaria.org). However, while references to the text of Psalm 47 can be found by simply comparing the lyrics, this does not provide a definitive link between the psalm and ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´.

In the majority of Jewish traditions, Psalm 47 is known as the ´Psalm of Shofar Blowing´ as it is recited by the congregation seven consecutive times prior to blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. The blowing of the shofar is performed following a set formula after the following words are said in the prescribed combination: ´Tekiyah Shevarim Truah Tekiyah´ three times; and ´Tekiyah Shevarim Tekiyah´ three times; and ´Tekiyah Truah Tekiyah´ three times. The words are onomatopoeic and are long and drawn out. Furthermore, the sounds of the shofar bear no relation to the form of U2's song.

Relating ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´ to Psalm 150 has more congruence with the melody that is commonly used in the Sabbath day synagogue service for Psalm 150 ('Hallelujah').

[16] 'Biblical References in U2 lyrics', atu2.com (now deleted)

The word ‘hallelujah (הַלְלוּיָהּ) is translated as ‘praise him’, so if the phrase ‘With a shout’ is transposed with ‘hallelujah’ it can sound like the Sabbath prayer, with the rhythm of the couplets matching in the same 4/4 time:

Hebrew	*Koren Jerusalem Bible* version	Transposition of 'Hallelujah' and ‘with a shout’
הַלְלוּ־יָהּ ׀ הַלְלוּ־אֵל בְּקָדְשׁוֹ הַלְלוּהוּ בִּרְקִיעַ עֻזּוֹ׃ הַלְלוּהוּ בִגְבוּרֹתָיו הַלְלוּהוּ כְּרֹב גֻּדְלוֹ׃ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֵקַע שׁוֹפָר הַלְלוּהוּ בְּנֵבֶל וְכִנּוֹר׃ הַלְלוּהוּ בְּתֹף וּמָחוֹל הַלְלוּהוּ בְּמִנִּים וְעֻגָב׃ הַלְלוּהוּ בְצִלְצְלֵי־שָׁמַע הַלְלוּהוּ בְּצִלְצְלֵי תְרוּעָה׃ כֹּל הַנְּשָׁמָה תְּהַלֵּל יָהּ הַלְלוּ־ יָהּ׃	Haleluya! Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his exceeding greatness. Praise him with the sound of the shofar: praise him with the harp and lyre. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and the pipe. Praise him upon sounding cymbals: praise him upon loud clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Haleluya!	**With a shout!** Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his exceeding greatness. Praise him with the sound of the shofar: praise him with the harp and lyre. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and the pipe. Praise him upon sounding cymbals: praise him upon loud clashing cymbals. Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. **With a shout!**

Figure 10: Translations of Psalm 150 with transposition of ‘Hallelujah’ and ‘with a shout’

The structure of ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´ is hymn-like and thus a link can be made

between this U2 song and the musical history and development of hymns and their Hebrew roots. The drawn out repetition of the word 'Jer-us-a-lem' is the basis of the chorus, with a second voice joining on 'lem' the fourth syllable. This is followed by the refrain 'Shout, shout, with a shout / Shout it out, shout / Shout it out.´ Each repetition has a different emphasis, with the final 'shout it out' finishing the song. The very specific imagery used in ´With A Shout (Jerusalem)´ creates a vision of a distant place, with the lyrics coupled in the style of the Bible. 'I want to go, to the foot of Mount Zion; To the foot of He who made me see', is an explicit reference to the Genesis story, Binding of Isaac, when Abraham was instructed by God to kill his son Isaac at the foot of the mountain. ´To the side of a hill blood was spilt / We were filled with a love / And we're going to be there again´ connects with the ´Niggun "Akedah"´ which Oren Roman and Eliyahu Schleifer (Yuval, Vol 11, 2020) describe as an enduring Ashkenazi melody associated with the Binding of Isaac, which was sung to texts in both Hebrew and Yiddish in diaspora communities for hundreds of years.

2. 'Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)' (*The Joshua Tree* re-release 2007)

´Wave Of Sorrow (Birdland)´ was produced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois and recorded by Flood. The song has only been performed once live, during a 20-minute acoustic set at the Union Chapel in North London, in a gig for Mencap as part of the charity's Little Noise Sessions. The lyrics are not listed on U2.com therefore this analysis uses the version from fan-maintained website, U2songs.com. The song runs for 4.06 minutes with two obvious parts in which Bono describes the Ethiopian famine in 1984 from his own first-hand experience. The lyrics of the first part are structured like a Bible portion, which I have marked up as being (1A) 'statements of place', followed by (1B) 'questions'. The second part is the 'blessings' which Bono recites in couplets as a spoken word chant. I have marked these parts below as Section 1 and Section 2.

Section 1A is a graphic narration by Bono of the experiences of the Ethiopian people during the famine. It also serves as a 'statement of place' because it describes the place itself, with imagery of the landscape, the 'cruel sun', and the 'nobility on its knees' referring to the Biblically described 'noble' people of Ethiopia. The second part of this section, labelled 1B, frames a series of questions, the first of which begins with a phrase repeated from Section 1B 'And if the rain came'. The questions, in the form of rhyming couplets, are used as a device to describe the place before the famine and ends with a mournful reflection on the absence of

God. The intense desert imagery used in the lyrics of ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´ creates an intertextual allusion that relates to the Passover story told in Exodus 13. The music creates an oppressive, sombre sonic soundscape that builds on the verbal narrative, the music swirling, intimating the oppressive 'heat haze' and a sense of dryness in a vast alien place.

Section 1A - 'Statements of Place':

Heat haze rising / On Hell's own hill
To wake up this morning / Was an act of will
You walked through the night / To get here today
To bring your children / To give them away
Oh, oh this cruel sun / Its daylight never done
Cruelty just begun / To make a shadow of everyone
And if the rain came / And if the rain came now
Souls bent over without a breeze / Blankets on burning trees
I'm sick without disease / Nobility on its knees

Section 1 B - 'Questions':

And if the rain came / And if the rain came now
Would it wash us all away / On a wave of sorrow
Wave / Wave of sorrow

Where now the holy cities / Where all the ancient holy scrolls
Where now the Emperor Menelik / The Queen of Sheba's gold
You, my bride, wear her crown / On your finger a precious stone
Has every good thing now / Been sold
Son of shepherd boy now king/ What wisdom can you bring
What lyric could you sing / Where is the music of the seraphim
//

Section 2 - 'Blessings':

Blessed are the meek who scratch in the dirt

For they shall inherit what's left of the earth
Blessed are the kings who have left their thrones
They are blessed in this valley of dry bones
Blessed are you with an empty heart
For you have nothing from which you cannot part
Blessed is the ego if it's all we've got this hour
Blessed is the voice that speaks truth to power
Blessed is the sex worker's body sold tonight
She works with what she's got to save her children's life
Blessed are the deaf who cannot hear her scream
Blessed are the stupid who can dream
Blessed are the tin can cardboard slums
And blessed is the spirit that overcomes

Section 2 of ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´ is significant because it is the first time that a list of 'blessings' features in a U2 song. Bono wails the word 'wave' before he starts the 'blessings' and finishes with a breathy, softly delivered line, 'And blessed is the spirit that overcomes'. Brachot (prayers) are integral to every aspect of Jewish life and often start with בָּרוּךְ 'Blessed be'.

Orthodox Jews say a form of blessing ('Brachot' or benedictions) every time they pray or eat, Scheindlin (2002, p 40) stating ´These benedictions, ubiquitous in rabbinic Judaism, both in public and private rituals, were originally—and in some cases remain—short statements of praise in the form "Blessed are you, Lord, our God, King of the world, who..."´ A common example is the Birkat Hamazon, or 'Grace after the meal', composed in Talmudic Israel/Babylon (c.400 BCE–c.600 CE), which starts with the phrase 'Blessed are you' (Singer, sefaria.org, 1915). The concept of blessings is first found in Genesis 1:28 when God created humans and ´blessed them´ saying, ´Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.´ Furthermore in Genesis 23:1 God blessed Abraham, and Genesis 27:29 ´Cursed be they who curse you, Blessed they who bless you´, indicating that blessing is the act of calling out for God to favour the recipient.

Two Examples of blessings in the Psalms are tabled below:

Eg 1: Psalm 115:12-15 (*Koren Jerusalem Bible*)	Eg 2: Psalm 128:3-6 *(Koren Jerusalem Bible*)
The Lord has been mindful of us: he will bless us; he will bless the house of Yisra'el; he will bless the house of Aharon. He will bless those who fear the Lord, both small and great. May the Lord increase you more and more, you and your children. May you be blessed of the Lord who made heaven and earth.	Thy wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the recesses of thy house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table. Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord. The Lord shall bless thee out of Żiyyon: and thou shalt see the good of Yerushalayim all the days of thy life. And thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Yisra'el.

Figure 11: Examples of blessings in Psalms

Within the list of ′blessings′ Bono uses phrases from the Hebrew Bible, referring to the ′valley of dry bones′ of Ezekiel 37:1-3:′And He said to me, **"Prophesy** over these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD!"′ The ′valley of dry bones′ has become a significant Holocaust reference and given Bono's exposure to Celan's Holocaust-inspired poetry, the Peace Museum in Japan and then the famine in Ethiopia it is reasonable to argue his lyrics make an explicit intertextual reference to the prophetic portion of the Tanakh.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Bono started writing the lyrics for ′Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)′ while the band were working on *The Joshua Tree*, however the song was not completed and released until 2007 when it was included on the anniversary collection, *The Joshua Tree Album Remastered*. The lyrics of ′Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)′ describe Bono and his wife Ali's first-hand experience of the 1984 Ethiopian famine told as a Bible story. Bono uses 1 Kings 10 as the basis for the lyrics of ′Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)′, the Biblical text referring to the gold the Queen of Sheba gave to King Solomon (Bono's ′son of shepherd boy now king′) when she visited him in Jerusalem. She gives him a bounty of gold, and

´from Ophir´ an enormous quantity of wood which he uses to make harps and lyres (or ´harps and psalteries to [accompany] the vocalists´. Bono also names the Emperor Menelik I, who was said to be the son of King Solomon and Makeda, the Queen of Sheba, and accordingly gave the Ethiopian people a direct lineage from the Kings of Israel, and the creators of the Psalms, Kings David and Solomon. At the height of the famine in 1984, the Beta Israel tribe of Ethiopian Jews were recognised by the State of Israel as a Jewish community and evacuated to Israel. The Queen of Sheba has been referred to in texts from Islam, Judaism and Christianity and is now understood to be one of the ´most important Black figures from Israel's past.´ (Stinchcomb, 2021, pg 1).

The lyrical reference by Bono to the Queen of Sheba and the Emperor Menelik signifies how his view of the world is framed by the Hebrew Bible: ´They say Ethiopia was the Garden of Eden and you can certainly see the Queen of Sheba in those faces´ (Bono et al, 2006, p. 210), and sees him questioning where the God of the Bible is at these times of intense human suffering. If Solomon, the King of Israel, gives her 'everything she wanted and asked for' (וְהַמֶּלֶךְ שְׁלֹמֹה נָתַן) then why the famine, why the holocaust? This song is about Bono's faith being tested, and he uses the Hebrew Bible as evidence of broken promises and the great lengths society needs to go to in order to heal the world.

The tone, melody and words of ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´ are mournful, opening with piano and a soft timpani drum in the background signifying that this is not a typical high-energy rock song at the start. The drum builds but remains in the background with a synthesized sound underneath the track sounds like a desert wave, the sound of sand whipping over a barren land. The spiritual and biblical nature of the song is present in both sections but manifested in different ways. Selichot relates to the 13 attributes of mercy and as such fits with the narrative outlined in Chapter 3, that links ´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´ to Lamentations.

3. ´Love Rescue Me´ (*Rattle and Hum)*

Rattle and Hum saw U2 immersed in the USA, collaborating with American artists and recording in part at Sun Studios in Memphis. There is folklore about how ´Love Rescue Me´ was written along the lines of 'Bono had a dream that he wrote a Bob Dylan song', with the two collaborating to finish the lyrics Bono had started. The authorship of this song goes to the

point of what is and is not Jewish music as explored in the literature review: ′Love Rescue Me′ is not a ‘Jewish song’ just because one of the songwriters was born Jewish. Bob Dylan is arguably the most significant Jewish artist U2 has worked with but others include Lou Reed, who U2 toured with on Amnesty’s Conspiracy of Hope concerts; Howie B, producer and engineer; and Leonard Cohen. Bob Dylan has written more than 600 songs (Kooper, 2022) and was awarded the 2016 Nobel Prize for literature, the first popular musician to be given this accolade.

′Love Rescue Me′ is a hybrid with elements of Biblical text, American folk music, organ, brass, and the rock bass, guitar and drums of U2. It starts with harmonica and guitar strumming as a stylistic nod to Bob Dylan. Within this song there are two references to the Bible: the obvious Psalm 23 and the less obvious, Amos. It is not clear whose love is rescuing ‘me’. This is an example of the ambiguity of who U2’s songs are addressed to. Bono could be beseeching God to rescue him, or it could be a statement of faith. The combination of the lyrics, the instrument, the arrangement and the persona of the singer all give clues to what the song might mean. There are additional signifiers on the original version of the song from *Rattle and Hum* including Dylan and Bono using deliberately Biblical language, or the ‘old English’ of the *King James Bible* with words ‘Thou’, ‘reveal’, ‘come forth and speak to me’. As prose it reads like a story of a return to ‘love’ after a loss of faith, which is the trajectory of Psalm 22 (the Psalm composed in honour of the Purim miracle) to Psalm 23, but could also be seen as the story of 1980s Dylan, who is said to have ‘found’ Christ and converted to Christianity but then returned to Judaism.

The second verse can be read as the lyricist talking about their own experience in the public eye, or it could be about wrestling with faith, or how their songs are used by others to ‘find themselves’. The ‘stranger’ is found in the lyrics of a number of other U2 songs that have more than one biblical reference including ′Stranger in A Strange Land′ (*October*), ′Breathe′ (*No Line On The Horizon*), ′White As Snow′ (*No Line On The Horizon*) and ′Miracle Drug′ (*How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*).

Many strangers have I met
On the road to my regret
Many lost who seek to find themselves in me.
They ask me to reveal

The very thoughts they would conceal.
Love, rescue me.

Psalm 23 is recited by the officiating clergy at Jewish funerals (Raphael, 2022, p. 439). In ´Love Rescue Me´ the lyricists have not used the text to praise God, as the text and the tenses are changed from Psalm 23's 'thy rod and staff comfort me' to '**I have cursed** thy rod and staff / They **no longer** comfort me' in ´Love Rescue Me´. The 'dark' feeling of Psalm 22 is brought into Psalm 23 by saying 'I have cursed'. Dylan, having been brought up Jewish and at some stage a Christian convert, was well versed in the Bible in all its forms. The deliberate alteration of tense and narrative within the Psalm can be interpreted as U2 engaging in a provocative act, aimed at eliciting responses from evangelical Christians who, during that juncture in the band's trajectory, were laying claim to U2 as constituents of their own.

Psalm 23.4
גַּם כִּי־אֵלֵךְ בְּגֵיא צַלְמָוֶת לֹא־אִירָא רָע כִּי־אַתָּה עִמָּדִי שִׁבְטְךָ וּמִשְׁעַנְתֶּךָ הֵמָּה יְנַחֲמֻנִי׃
Though I walk through a valley of deepest darkness,
I fear no harm, for You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff—they comfort me.

While in this case it is easy to take particular words or verses and draw inferences of their Jewish roots, there are other elements that could be linked to the Hebrew Bible. All the verses of ´Love Rescue Me´ work with the rhythmic syntax of Psalm 23 and also Amos, but that does not give them their meaning, as Rav Elchanan Samet writes: ´To clarify the meaning of a psalm in the book of *Tehillim*, it does not suffice to understand the meaning of its words and verses in themselves. Understanding the words and verses is indeed necessary as a foundation for the stage that follows—revealing the structure of the psalm. Perhaps this stage should be defined differently: Revealing the plan of the psalm, on the basis of which its words and verses were written. Only by seeing the psalm as a whole, with its various parts and the way that they are connected to each other to form a single entity—can we clarify its meaning. Understanding the meaning of the entire psalm is likely to influence our interpretation of various details in it. It turns out then that the interpretation of the psalm's words and verses, and the revelation of the psalm's structure, are two processes that influence each other, in the sense of ´tongs that are made with tongs´ (*Avot* 5:6).

In the Jewish version of Psalm 23 the text is translated from Hebrew to English as ‘I walk through the valley of darkness’ and is transliterated as ‘Gam ki eileikh be-gei tzalmavet’. In the King James Version of the Bible the word צַלְמָוֶת (tzalmavet) is translated as ‘shadow of death’. Some Jewish scholars suggest ‘tzalmavet’ is misused because it is read if it were a compound of tzel / צַל (shadow) and mavet / מָוֶת (death). More recently it has been more common for translations to read the word as if it were pronounced tzalamut, which is ´an intense form tzel´ / צַל (shadow) (Etshalom, 2019).

Each verse of the recorded version of the song ´Love Rescue Me´ ends with the three-word phrase, ‘love, rescue me’ except for the ‘ad libbed’ verse when Bono sings ‘shahahlala’ and ends with ‘**I said**, love, rescue me’, the vocal emphasis being on the first two words. The addition of ‘I said’, provides emphasis to the verse in a style that evokes Evangelical preaching. The final verse is sung more softly without the brass, a stripped back version of the earlier parts of the song:

I've conquered my past
The future is here at last
I stand at the entrance to a new world I can see.
The ruins to the right of me
Will soon have lost sight of me.
Love, rescue me.

´Love Rescue Me´ has only been performed live by U2 on 70 occasions. It was a staple on the *Lovetown Tour* in 1989–1990 but was then retired from the live set, performed only four times until U2’s residency in Las Vegas in 2023 where it was featured regularly on the setlist in rotation with other songs from the *Rattle and Hum* era. Performing ´Love Rescue Me´ in Las Vegas in December, 2023, Bono changed the last verse to:

We’ve not conquered our past
The future is here to last
We stand at the entrance of a future we squint to see
Ruins to the right of us, well they look a lot like us,
Love rescue me.

In the Hebrew Bible, the concepts of 'left' and 'right' are frequently employed as metaphorical devices, carrying significant symbolic weight beyond their literal directional meanings. This metaphorical usage is particularly evident in several key passages and their subsequent interpretations by biblical scholars. One notable example can be found in Psalm 73:23, which states, ´But I am continually with Thee: Thou holdest my right hand´ (Koren Jerusalem Bible). The *Artscroll Tehillim* (p. 920) cites Rabbi Obadiah Sforno (circa1475-1550) ´because he is my right hand I shall not falter´ (Sforno, n.d.), an interpretation suggesting a metaphorical understanding of the 'right hand' as a source of strength and stability. Furthermore, Rabbi David Kimchi (RaDaK), a prominent Talmudic scholar active between 1160 and 1235 CE, argued that the ´right hand is the proper path´, implying a moral or spiritual dimension to the metaphor. The metaphorical significance of the 'right hand' is further exemplified in Psalm 137:5, which declares, ´If I forget thee, O Yerushalayim, let my right hand forget her cunning´ (*Koren Jerusalem Bible*). This verse equates the loss of the 'right hand's' function with the betrayal of cultural and religious identity, underscoring the profound symbolic importance attached to this concept. In addition, Psalm 2:6, which states, ´His right hand embraces me,´ has been interpreted allegorically as symbolising God's love for Israel. This interpretation extends the metaphorical use of 'right' beyond individual human experience to encompass the relationship between the divine and the nation.

The symbolic importance of 'left' and 'right' is not limited to the Psalms. In Genesis 48:13, for example, Israel (also known as Jacob) blesses Ephraim and Manasseh using his left and right hands, a gesture laden with allegorical meaning regarding the bestowal of favour and primacy. In contemporary contexts, these biblical metaphors continue to resonate so that the lyrics in ´Love Rescue Me´, ´We've not conquered our past´ can be interpreted as an allusion to unresolved conflicts rooted in biblical narratives, suggesting a failure to internalise historical lessons. This interpretation is indicative of the modern era´s inability to discern between 'left' and 'right', symbolising moral or spiritual confusion. Moreover, the reference to ´ruins to the right of us´ in the context of contemporary conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine could be seen as a modern embodiment of these biblical metaphors. This usage potentially draws a parallel between ancient biblical wars and current global geopolitical strife, emphasising the enduring relevance of these metaphorical constructs and the ongoing relevance of the Hebrew text.

4. ´Moment of Surrender´ (*No Line On The Horizon*)

No Line On The Horizon was partly recorded in Fez, Morocco after the band members had attended the Sacred World Music Conference in 2007. The single ´Moment of Surrender´ was recorded in one take at the hotel Riad El Yacout with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois. In his memoir *Surrender* Bono describes the experience of writing and recording the song as a mystical, almost spiritual event that ´came out of the blue´ (Bono, 2022, p. 539). Even to the casual listener a variety of non-European influences can be heard on ´Moment of Surrender´. The rolling hand drum that starts the track is used in Sufism, practised in Morocco, and there is an organic feel to the hand claps that start 12 bars before the vocal. The influence of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish tradition is concealed but is in plain sight, in the way Bono uses his voice, where he uses the melody to accent and draw out the words, rather than focusing on the key of the song.

The style of ´Moment of Surrender´ is not typical of U2, as it has an undulating rhythm and vocal that sounds slightly strained. Bono says he was experimenting with ´different sides´ of his voice (Bono, 2022, p. 539) and was influenced by the Moroccan setting. The additional repetition of the chorus, and backing vocalists create a sound like a congregation joining the chazzan, with Bono's humming at the end of the verse bearing some similarity to a Hasidic niggun. In the traditional songs of the Jews of Morocco there are documented examples of this style of singing on the high holy days when it is likely that the entire congregation would be together in the synagogue for prayer services, for example *shofet-kol-haaretz* ´Judge of all the Earth´, a piyyut with Sephardic influences (Seroussi, 2018). While *shofet-kol-haaretz* does not have exactly the same poetic style as U2's ´Moment of Surrender´, there are some similarities, particularly in the 4/4 beat and the use of one voice singing the verses and many voices, slightly behind the lead, joining for the 'chorus'.

Bono said in an interview with Sean O'Hegan, ´These are very personal stories even though they are written in character and, in a way, they couldn't be further from my own politics. But, in the sense of the peripheral vision, there's a world out there. As the old blues song goes, a world gone wrong´ (Bono, 2009). With ´Moment of Surrender´ it seems Bono is revisiting the themes of the *War* album. In the limited-edition booklet available with some versions of *No Line on the Horizon,* Bono says that the song is about a character who is a war veteran in a pit of despair and that he 'begs God to deliver them'—the 'them' referring to the

veteran and his wife.

We set ourselves on fire
Oh God, do not deny her
It's not if I believe in love
But if love believes in me
Oh, believe in me

In his memoir Bono recalls he was talking about 'surrender' with Brian Eno and concluded ´the only true way to be victorious is to surrender. To each other. To love. To a higher power´. (Bono, 2022, p. 536). The lyrics do not quote the Bible, but the language used has resonance with Bono's regular incorporation of Biblical themes. In Judaism the ancient spiritual idea of 'surrender' comes from the willingness to accept the Torah as a text of truth, to suspend disbelief, to 'surrender' to God. The persona Bono assumes when singing ´Moment of Surrender´ demonstrates the attributes of surrender and responsibility, which in the ultra-Orthodox Jewish tradition ´are inseparable attributes essential to every intimate relationship, including the relationship between G-d and humankind. We regard our relationship with G-d as a marriage, and apply what we learn from that to our human relationships.´ Bono says, ´Surrender is not a word that comes easily to me… it's the antidote to anger´.

I was speeding on the subway
Through the stations of the cross
Every eye looking every other way
Counting down 'til the Pentecost

In a Jewish reading of this verse it could be that the singer rushes past the Christian symbolism of the cross, eyes are averted, ´Counting down til the Pentecost´, the 50th day which is the English name given to the Jewish festival Shavuot שבועות ('weeks'). Rushing past the 'stations of the cross' and seeing everyone else doing the same, reflects the loss of faith in modern society, except by those who recognise the Pentecost, the Jewish holiday which occurs when it is late spring in Israel, 50 days after the beginning of Passover. The Omer is counted for 49 days (7 weeks) until Shavuot, which celebrates the date when God gave the Torah to the Jewish people on Mount Sinai. When the Temple stood in Jerusalem

Shavuot was one of the three pilgrimage festivals Jews celebrated. On the festival of Shavuot it is customary to read Megillat Ruth in the synagogue. Ruth, a convert, was the great-grandmother of King David and Megillat Ruth was written by the prophet Samuel (Shmuel) to record the lineage of King David. There is a transcendent connection therefore between the song ´Moment of Surrender´ and Jewish converts in particular, who chose to rush past the stations of the cross (Christianity) to count down to the Pentecost.

> At the moment of surrender
> Of vision of over visibility
> I did not notice the passers-by
> And they did not notice me

This analysis of ´Moment of Surrender´ considers how the lyrics might relate to Jewish concepts of prophecy and vision. The line, ´At the moment of surrender / Of vision of over visibility´ prompts reflection on whether visions are prophetic but can only be seen by those who are visible. In Judaism, Moses is the most important prophet, and he was reluctantly visible and did not seek leadership. This paradox of the reluctant prophet being the most visible aligns with the song's themes of surrender and transformation. The use of ´passers-by´ in plural is noteworthy, as it could represent those who are not privy to prophetic experiences.

Miller's (2020) work aids this analysis of the lyrics as he argues, ´Vision is an overlapping category with prophecy, which is usually delivered verbally via an appearance of God or an angel; however it is possible to have visions which are not prophetic (any such experience not directed from God is not prophecy) just as it is possible to have prophecies which are not visions (but verbal, or even simply by insight)´ (p. 342). This distinction between vision and prophecy adds depth to the song's exploration of spiritual insight. The lyrics, ´I did not notice the passers-by / And they did not notice me´ could be interpreted as commentary on the often solitary and internal nature of such spiritual experiences, aligning with the Jewish concept that prophecy is a rare and elevated state, not accessible to everyone.

5. ´13 (There is a Light)´ (*Songs of Experience*)

As the closing track on U2's 14th studio album, *Songs of Experience*, ´13 (There is a Light)´ serves as a bookend to ´I Will Follow´, the opening track of U2's debut album *Boy*.

This juxtaposition reflects the band's journey from innocence to experience and offers a nuanced portrayal of the lyricist's relationship with himself and his concept of a 'higher power'. The song's title and themes invite multiple interpretations. In Jewish tradition, the age of 13 marks a boy's transition to manhood. Thus, ´13 (There is a Light)´ can be read as a maturation of the concept expressed in ´Twilight´ (*Boy*)—'in the shadow boy meets man'—to the present, where the boy has become a man and emerged from the metaphorical shadow. This interpretation aligns with the album's overarching theme of experience.

´13 (There is a Light)´ is a reworking of ´Song For Someone´ from *Songs of Innocence*, exemplifying a series of 'mirror' tracks that span both *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*. These tracks incorporate musical elements, melodies, and lyrical samples from their counterparts. In ´13 (There is a Light)´, this mirroring is evident in the lyrics, melody, and chorus. The original lyric 'this is a song for someone' evokes King Solomon and the Psalms, establishing a connection to biblical traditions. This connection is further reinforced by the inclusion of Israel in the Apple Bus virtual reality experience clip for ´Song for Someone´.

The song's title and content demonstrate a significant lyrical connection to Ecclesiastes 2:13: ´Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness´ (*The Koren Jerusalem Bible*). This connection is particularly significant given that Ecclesiastes is traditionally read during Sukkot in Jewish practice. The concept of 'light' in the song can be interpreted as a reference to Torah, underscoring its spiritual significance. The song also establishes an intertextual connection with Leonard Cohen's ´Anthem´, particularly through the lyric, 'There is a crack, a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in'. This relationship between the two works merits further exploration to fully understand Cohen's intended meaning and its relevance to U2's work.

In his memoir *Surrender*, Bono revealed that between recording *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, he faced a significant health crisis. This personal experience provides context for the reworking of ´Song for Someone´ into ´13 (There is a Light)´, framing it as a poignant message to his children. Bassist Adam Clayton elaborated on this theme in an interview with *The Sun:* ´There are a lot of songs about light in the U2 repertoire. It's an image of faith and obviously people having near-death experiences describe seeing a bright

light. So these are themes that are being spoken about′ (Cosyns, 2017).

The lyric of ′13 (There is a Light)′: ′darkness gathers around the light′ invokes elements of Genesis 1:

In the Beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form and void;
And darkness was on the face of the deep.
And a wind from God moved over the surface of the waters.
And God said, ′Let there be light:′ and there was light.

Thus the ‘light’ referenced in ′13 (There is a Light)′ can be interpreted as an allusion to both the end and the beginning as described in Genesis. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks offers an insightful perspective on this: ′Genesis is less about God than about human beings and their relationship with God. The theology is almost always implicit rather than explicit′ (Sacks, 2009). This interpretation aligns with the song's exploration of human experience and spirituality. Rabbi Sacks further elucidates: ′God is found, first and foremost, not in the blinding light of the sun, nor in the majesty of mountains. He is not in the almost infinitely vast spaces of the universe, with its hundreds of billions of galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars… God is to be found not by looking but by listening. He lives in words.′ This perspective provides a framework for understanding the song's emphasis on light as a metaphor for divine presence and wisdom.

The Hebrew Biblical influence is further evident in the lyric, ′When the wind screams and shouts / And the sea is a dragon's tail′, which echoes Isaiah 27:1: ′In that day the LORD will punish, With His great, cruel, mighty sword Leviathan the Elusive Serpent— Leviathan the Twisting Serpent; He will slay the Dragon of the sea′. This reference to Isaiah connects ′13 (There is a Light)′ to the festival of Sukkot and the water libation ritual: Ecclesiastes is recited in the morning service of Shabbat of the intermediate days of the festival (Chol HaMoed) of Sukkot. Samson Raphael Hirsch, a leading 19th-century German rabbi, explains why Ecclesiastes, which explores the vanity of human endeavours, is read on this holiday: ′as it shows that the maintenance of the body and the spirit of the nation is through God. This is in order to know that, without God, all human competition, all human actions and calculations, as well as the results of the toil of his efforts and his mighty hand—they are

altogether empty´ (Horeb 666:36, Sefaria.org).

Another significant lyrical connection can be found in the line, ´And if the terrors of the night / Come creeping into your days´, which evokes Psalm 91:5: ´Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, Nor of the arrow that flieth by day´. This allusion extends to Psalm 13:4 ´enlighten my eyes / lest I slumber into death´, which resonates with the chorus lyric, 'There is a light you can't always see'. Notably, Psalm 13 begins with the phrase 'how long', creating an intertextual link to U2's earlier song ´40´. Rav Elchanan Samet's commentary on Psalm 13 provides further insight into the structure and meaning of ´13 (There is a Light)´. Samet argues: ´In Biblical poetry (and in lyrical poetry in general), shortening often serves to intensify the expression and to deepen the mental process that is expressed in the poem. In (Psalm 13) it would appear that the three gradually shortening stanzas are like a tower, one story built upon the other. The base of the psalm, which stands on the ground, is broad and spelled out in detail, whereas its top, which reaches toward heaven, is narrow and concentrated. As he rises in the tower, the speaker in our psalm advances from the complaint sounded in stanza I to the supplication voiced in stanza II to the praise of stanza III.´ (Samet, 2020) This structural progression from complaint to praise is mirrored in the emotional journey of ´13 (There is a Light)´.

The number 13 in the song's title has significance. While in Western Christian tradition, 13 is often associated with misfortune, in Judaism it holds profound meaning. Maimonides' *13 Principles of Faith and the 13 Attributes of Mercy* underscore its importance. Moreover, the gematria (numerical value) of both 'Moses' (Mosheh) and 'Messiah' (Moshiach) in Hebrew relates to the number 13. As one source explains: ´The numerical value of "Mosheh" (Moses) is 345, and that of "Moshiach," is 358. A simple numeric calculation shows the difference between Moses and Moshiach is 13; or it can be expressed as "Moses + 13 = Moshiach." Or put another way, 'Echad' means one/13; Moses plus echad equals Moshiach.´ This numerological connection imbues ´13 (There is a Light)´ with significant Kabbalistic meaning, potentially alluding to the Jewish belief in a future Messianic era. Furthermore, in Jewish tradition, 13 marks the age of bar mitzvah, when a boy is considered to reach religious maturity and is counted in a minyan (prayer quorum). This adds another layer of meaning to the song's themes of maturation and spiritual growth.

The repetition of words and phrases throughout U2's lyrical catalogue mirrors the

technique employed in the Psalms, where similar words are repeated in different combinations. This intertextual approach allows for shifting meanings depending on context, a feature evident in ´13 (There is a Light)´. Musically, ´13 (There is a Light)´ is characterised by a relatively sparse arrangement, featuring soft drums and keyboard. The drum beat, which remains constant throughout the song, is particularly noteworthy. Although Larry Mullen Jr. appears to be using mallets in the video, the softened effect on the drum evokes hand drumming, maintaining a 4/4 time signature at a tempo that matches the pace of the vocals. This consistent rhythm bears resemblance to the steady beat that may have been present in ancient Hebrew Temple music, although definitive evidence of such practices is limited.

It is worth noting that while the song's biblical references are evident, they are presented in contemporary language, reminiscent of Eugene Peterson's 'The Message' translation. The lyrics eschew archaic phrasing like 'thou' and 'come forth', instead employing modern vernacular. This does not make the words any less congruent with the original Hebrew Bible and Jewish interpretation, rather it is an indication of how U2 consistently bring the ancient text into their modern oeuvre. The song's placement as the closing track on the album is significant. Its reflective, ballad-like quality is typical of U2's album closers, providing a contemplative conclusion to the work. The decision to number it as the 13th track on both digital and physical versions of the album serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it reinforces the thematic importance of the number 13. Secondly, in an era of digital streaming where listeners may not experience album tracks in their intended sequence, the numbered title ensures that the song's position as the final track is clear.

In conclusion, ´13 (There is a Light)´ serves as a multifaceted work that encapsulates U2's journey from their early days to their mature period. The song's rich tapestry of biblical allusions, particularly drawing from Jewish traditions, demonstrates the band's continued engagement with spiritual themes. By interweaving references to Genesis, Ecclesiastes, and the Psalms with contemporary language and music, U2 creates a piece that bridges ancient wisdom with modern experience. The song's exploration of light as a metaphor for divine presence, wisdom, and hope resonates with both biblical tradition and human experience. Its thematic connections to earlier U2 works, as well as to other artists like Leonard Cohen, situate it within the broader context of spiritually-infused popular music. Furthermore, the numerological significance of 13 in Jewish tradition adds depth to the song's title and themes, inviting listeners to consider multiple layers of meaning. This complexity reflects U2's

evolution as songwriters and their ability to create works that reward close analysis while remaining accessible to a wide audience.

CHAPTER 6: Live Performance

A contributing factor to U2's longevity is their strength as a live act, aspects of which connect the band to the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Hebrew Temple through the sense of ritual, songs being performed in a particular order, and the main players leading and the congregation following. Without an audience, the performance does not exist; similarly, in Jewish ritual performance, the service cannot exist without participants. At times the community of U2 fans behave like a religious congregation, developing their own rituals through the addition of particular chants or props such as signs and balloons. Moments of spontaneity, when the leader/singer or those gathered, carry the tune to a different place, or change the words to suit the moment exist in both settings. Worshipers who carried offerings to the Hebrew Temple are similar to fans in that their rituals can only be carried out in the presence of the band. The performance of the band is also predetermined by the location and everything has to be in order: the supporting cast knows their roles, and there are predictable textual elements including the stance of the performers and the words they are reciting or singing. Simply playing songs on stage without any performative gestures is unlikely to elicit a strong physical reaction from the audience members or afford any meaningful participation. Karki says the ´musical rituals are very much based on similar elements in any massive religious ceremony´ (Karki, 2018, p. 110).

The extent to which a rock concert can be a religious or spiritual occasion is determined by those experiencing it. Christopher Small's concept of ´musicking´ provides a useful framework for understanding the performative and participatory nature of U2's concerts. Small argues that music is not merely an object or work, but an action in which all present are involved. He posits that through musicking, participants explore, affirm and celebrate their ideal relationships. In this context, U2's live performances can be seen as a collective act of musicking, where both band and audience actively contribute to creating meaning and fostering a sense of community. This aligns with Small's view that musical performances are inherently social and ritualistic, allowing participants to experience their desired relationships and identities. The audience members choose what they want from the encounter,

determining how much money and time they are willing to dedicate and their level of focus. Some audience members will focus on how close they can get to the stage, seeking to be active, visible participants; while others choose to sit and watch the show passively. The performance can offer a meaning, but ultimately it is the reception of the audience that determines whether the communication of that meaning is achieved. Cavicchi's research on Springsteen and fan engagement can equally apply to U2: ´A performance generates certain feelings of connection or exhilaration which are specific to the performance. Many performers have mentioned the high that they get from performing; Bruce Springsteen used to say that the only place he felt right was on stage. Music listeners, including Springsteen fans, likewise report a similar kind of high, which includes feelings of exhilaration, connection with the performer, and a sense of unity with other participants" (Cavicchi, 1998, p. 90).

As Karki points out many other scholars have written about U2's live shows including Beth Maynard, William Bart Tolleson and Theodore Lous Trots, who have all deconstructed the elements of their performance. Karki says ´Bono is a "biblical" performer of epic live moments´ (Karki, 2018, p. 109), but it is unclear what is meant by the term 'biblical performer'. The implication is that the performance is of the Bible and that Bono is a prophet, a 'navi' as described in the ancient text. Friedmann says in ancient Israel the prophets used singing and instruments as a ´signal of transcendence´ and that the oratory style of the ´literary prophets´ Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the 12 minor prophets ´voiced their pronouncements as auditory medium closely related to (and arguably identical with) music´ (Friedmann, 2014, pp. 125-126). The Hebrew Bible states explicitly what performers do: the Levites and the Kohanim have defined roles, but they do not act alone: their work is prescribed and without their participation in the temple ritual, the prayers and service are not able to be fulfilled. If Bono has an elevated status then the other three members of the band could be seen as his supports, like Aaron supports Moses, however the four members of the band have equal but distinctive roles as described in *U2 by U2* (2006).

There are aspects of live performance that allow the band to give their songs an identity that is not possible with a studio version, and as such intertextuality is even more evident at U2's live shows than on their records. On stage is where the songs are brought to life through collaboration with U2's creative team and the reception of the audience, which evolves over the course of a tour. Many of the Biblical references in U2's work are coded within live

performance. For example, as Allan Moore notes, Bono has used ‘hallelujah’ in various forms to elevate the moment and as a signal, but a search of U2’s lyrics reveals only two recorded songs with hallelujah in the lyrics: ´Hallelujah Here She Comes´ and ´Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses´, meaning Bono’s use of ‘hallelujah’ is almost always on stage. In the Hebrew Bible ‘hallelujah’ is a ´Liturgical expression meaning “praise the Lord,” which appears exclusively in the Book of Psalms. This expression generally opens or closes a psalm, and has a special repeating melodic phrase.´ (JMRC, n.d.) The prayer, ‘Hallel’ (‘praise’) is composed of Psalms 113-118 and has a significant place in some Jewish festivals, notably Sukkot and Passover, when it is recited every day. At the 360° Tour show in Pittsburgh, Bono sang Cohen's version before launching into ´Where the Streets Have No Name´.

Writing about Cohen’s ´Hallelujah´ Babich notes, ´The dual reading of the holy and broken Hallelujah appeals to certain articulations of the sacred and the profane, even as it turns out to be no more than illusion: superficial as appearances always are, as Nietzsche reminds us, where both religious and erotic dimensions happen to be present from the start, unfolding as they do with what may therefore be counted as the song’s incipit or first verse, beginning “Well I heard …” as Cohen tells us, “there was a secret chord …” ´(Babich, 2013, pp. 20-21). It is unlikely that Nietzsche, as a German philosopher in an anti-Jewish social and political environment would have considered a Jewish point of view in relation to the understanding of religious texts, however exploration of this incongruent marrying of ideas is not within the scope of this study. By using the word ‘hallelujah’ in live performance U2 is establishing a link with the Hebrew Bible and Biblical practice. Bono has used ‘hallelujah’ when performing other songs live, notably when performing at the Tibetan Freedom concert in 1997 when he uses hallelujah in ´Please´, saying ‘This is for Jeff Buckley’, drawing on the lyric from the Cohen song made famous by the late Buckley, to call for peace.

U2 reference local sources and issues in their performance, including mentioning notable audience members who will be celebrated by the crowd. William Williams recounts in *From the Ground Up* how these references are workshopped. The performances on the 2015 *iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour* and the 2018 *eXPERIENCE + iNNOCENCE Tour* were subtly tweaked according to the city where they were being performed. These place-based references were even more obvious even on the 2019 *Joshua Tree* tour when each show closed with the national flag of the country of the show, and when the ‘Women of the World’

slides screened during ´One´ featuring prominent local women, at times controversially. The release of the single ´Ahimsa´ when U2 toured India and the performance of the song on stage with A.R. Rahman and his daughters was peak intertextuality. Not only were U2 paying homage to local culture, but they were also appealing to the spiritual and religious imprint of the local audience, showing they are keenly aware of the significance of belief even in modern popular culture.

U2 first started recording and releasing videos of their live shows with *Under a Blood Red Sky,* however over time video has become more accessible. The Zoo TV show was based on the interplay of television/video and live experience, so from this time (early 90s) on there is more footage available. With the advent of personal recording devices (smartphones including the U2-backed iphones[17]) the bans that used to stop people from filming and recording live shows became pretty much obsolete, and there is now a proliferation on the internet of both official and unofficial videos of whole shows and individual songs.

Experiencing U2's musical rituals in live performance

The following analysis of five U2 songs, ´Where the Streets Have No Name´, ´Bullet the Blue Sky´, ´Until the End of the World´, ´Staring at the Sun´ and ´Walk On´ offers an interpretation of aspects of notable performances that have significance from a Jewish perspective. These are impactful songs, all of which have been performed live several hundred times with significant developments in their evolution as musical rituals, particularly in terms of the images used, how they are physically interpreted by the band members, and the spoken dialogue Bono uses before and during the songs. This study is not a comprehensive investigation of the signs and codes in all the performances of these songs, but by unpacking the themes in the staging and the lyrics it is possible to introduce new ways of understanding their meaning, particularly in a Jewish context.

Having experienced all of these songs live first-hand, for the purposes of this study I have occasionally taken autoethnographic licence in describing the experience, where the context of my analysis cannot otherwise be fully understood. Generally, I have focused on watching

[17] The apple iPod and iPhone campaigns were financially backed by U2 and the band were featured in the advertising and marketing of the products.

clips available on YouTube and compared a number of performances, including those I did not attend in person. Many of these instances have been analysed before, but I am bringing a new perspective by focusing on elements that explicitly relate to the Jewish experience of the Hebrew Bible, particularly as it is used in communal worship and to affect the mood of the participant/worshipper.

1. ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ (*The Joshua Tree*)

According to data collected by the U2 fan website, U2gigs.com, the first track on *The Joshua Tree* album, ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ has been played live by U2 more than 900 times. I watched various versions available on YouTube, both official and unofficial, identifying religious and spiritual gestures and reflecting on how they have changed over time. In live performance, this song is a sonic and visual spectacle and much has been written about the meaning of the lyrics and how they are manifested in a physical experience. Returning to the theme of 'transition' described in the earlier chapter, 'Where the Streets Have No Name' has particular resonance with growth and change, and the effects of time and place, the unending desert plain recalling Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt and the 40 years they spent wandering in the desert.

Writing about the Pet Shop Boys' cover of 'Where the Streets Have No Name', Mark Butler suggests that the texture of 'Where the Streets Have No Name' foregrounds the individual compared to other Pet Shop Boys songs such as 'Go West' which has an explicit call and response and therefore evokes community (Butler, 2003, p. 8). Butler says that while 'Where the Streets Have No Name' does not have an overt political message found in many U2 songs, its seriousness is determined by the organ's 'chorale-like introduction' which suggests an atmosphere of spiritual contemplation. He says, 'The twin themes of spirituality and environment are expressed even more clearly in the song's lyrics, which use physical space as a metaphor for spiritual transcendence' (Butler, 2003, p. 2). This is relevant because Butler identifies the 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' of the song, which is unchanged regardless of who performs it.

While the structure of 'Where the Streets Have No Name' does not naturally engage the audience in specific responses, it fosters a communal experience familiar in Jewish worship, when congregants participate in the Amidah prayer, repeating 'Kedush kedush kedush' ('holy

holy holy') (Isaiah 6.3) after the congregation's leader. When repeating the Kedusha, congregants stand on tip-toes, straining to reach higher, to sing together and be ´like angels´. From my perspective as an audience member, having experienced more than 30 performances from 1987, this collective act of worship bears similarity to U2's fans who strain to see the stage and join Bono in singing, especially during the repetitive ´where the streets have no name´ chorus. This song is the most anticipated in U2's live set, with the audience collectively gasping as they hear the faint organ and see the red light signalling its start.

Over the history of U2's live performances, minor elements of the song have evolved, mirroring the adaptability of religious practices over time. The song evolves over time and according to the location of the concert just as religious rituals evolve with the input of a community. The Zoo TV show in 1993 (Era 3) showcased a more choreographed and theatrical performance, underscoring the song's spiritual elements. This was a period of great characters culminating in the character ´Mr MacPhisto´—´a washed-up campy cabaret singer cum devil, influenced by Faust's *Mephistopheles* and *Screwtape*, the fictional devil invented by fellow Irishman C. S. Lewis.´ (Galbraith, 2012, p. 181) The video of ´Where The Streets Have No Name´ recorded and released as the Zoo TV video/DVD on 27 November 1993 at Sydney Football Stadium in Sydney, showed red screens behind the band until the stage exploded with light. When Bono sang 'I go there with you, it's all I can do' he hugs himself, metaphorically and literally acknowledging the past as he looked up at the screen behind him showing a clip of himself at the Joshua Tree National Park, and said 'Hey you' and waved at himself.

During the performance at Slane Castle in 2001 (Era 4) the crowd sang along with Bono to 'I want to run'. However, after Bono sang 'I want to hide' he changed the original lyrics 'I wanna tear down the walls/ that hold me inside / I wanna reach out / And touch the flame / Where the streets have no name' to 'Tear down the walls that hold me tonight/ I see that rain cloud disappearing without a trace, but I can dance dance dance in the dirty rain / I'll show you a place with no sorrow or pain', thereby making it impossible for the audience to sing the whole song with him, as they did not know the new words and he did not teach them. Then, instead of signing 'go there with you it's all I can do' Bono changed it to 'go there with you, it's all WE can do'. This is a device Bono uses in ´One Tree Hill´ and ´Staring At the Sun´ and indicates that the band acknowledges the difference between studio recording and live

performance, where the audience is part of the experience and is one with the band members as a collective ´we´, using music to worship together, even if who they worship and how is not the same.

During U2's performance of ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ at the New Orleans Super Bowl halftime on February 3, 2002, the band incorporated a poignant tribute to the victims of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The names of the victims were displayed on a vertical scrim behind the stage and throughout the interior of the Louisiana Superdome, evoking a sense of commemoration akin to religious remembrance ceremonies, where names of those who have died are solemnly intoned. In the Jewish tradition, the act of remembering is significant, with families of the dead saying the Kaddish prayer every day for a year, and then annually on the 'yartzheit', the anniversary date in accordance with the Hebrew calendar. Additionally ´Yizkor´, (the Hebrew word meaning 'remembrance'), is recited on the last days of each of the three pilgrimage festivals (Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot) and on Yom Kippur. Raphael argues the practice of communal commemorative service was ´an entirely new liturgical innovation developed progressively in the Middle Ages´ (Raphael, 2022, p. 444) as a response to the trauma of ´major anti-Jewish outbreaks´ during the Crusades and at the time of the Black Death.

A different performance of ´Where the Streets Have No Name´ captured on the DVD of the 360° tour at the Rose Bowl on October 25, 2009, in Pasadena, California, starts with Bono singing ´Amazing Grace´ in a niggun-style chant with ecstatic fervour. He does not change the lyrics of ´Where the Streets Have No Name´, but thumps his heart with a closed fist when he sings, 'love love love', a gesture worshippers perform while reciting 'vidduy', the confession prayer using the first person plural on Yom Kippur. During the confession prayer, each sin is said out loud and forgiveness is sought as the individual thumps their hand on their chest over the heart, symbolically punishing themselves for each transgression.

Another recorded performance worth noting is the Accor Arena show in Paris, 6 December, 2015 which replaced the performance that was cancelled because of the attacks in Paris, including one at the Bataclan when more than 80 people were killed at an Eagles of Death Metal concert. In the 6 December performance ´Zooropa´ segues into ´Where The Streets Have No Name´ allowing Bono to draw a link between the idea of a united Europe and the narrative about American freedom that is usually understood to be the theme of

′Where The Streets Have No Name′. During ′Zooropa′ Bono uses hand gestures to accentuate the lyrics, and helicopter sounds throb behind the music. When the opening sound of the organ for ′Where the Streets Have No Name′ starts, Bono says ‘What do you want?’ and the screen hanging over the middle of the stage (the ‘barricage’) turns red. He says, ′I know what I want. A place to call home. Somewhere safe where they believe in liberté, égalité, fraternité, somewhere like right here.′ He continues with, ′And we don’t have to become a monster to defeat a monster.′ There are subtle modifications to some of the lyrics: e.g., ′our love turns to lust′, and when Bono sings ′la la la la la la la low low low′ and again changes ′when I go there′ to ′when WE go there with you′, the use of the collective noun contradicting Mark Butler’s finding that ′Where The Streets Have No Name′ foregrounds the individual.

The Joshua Tree tour in 2017 and 2019 saw ′Where the Streets Have No Name′ act as an anchor, signalling the start of the performance of tracks from *The Joshua Tree* album, which was played in full from start to finish following the original album track order. At the iconic Croke Park in Dublin, U2’s home ground, the Irish army flew jet planes overhead streaming smoke in the colours of the Irish flag during the song. The video showing behind the band on the stage during the Joshua Tree tour in 2017 and 2019 were of U2 and the desert during the time of the first *The Joshua Tree* album tour in America in 1987, the nostalgic imagery drawing the audience back to the ‘place, high on the desert plain’, signifying a return to the past.

The 2019 version of ′Where The Streets Have No Name′ performed on the Joshua Tree tour was simultaneously solemn and joyous. The audience, as seen in video footage from shows in Manilla and Perth were ecstatic. The band was thrilled with the response but playing ‘seriously’. Gone was the rushing around the stage and the overblown theatrics of earlier eras, instead the song was allowed to speak for itself while black and white footage from the ‘desert plains’ plays on the giant video screen behind the stage. The four members stood in tight formation, Bono standing close to the other three. He was no longer separate, messianic, but he was still the conductor, the cantor singing at the front, and encouraging the audience to join him by implication—not with explicit instruction but by his body language and facial expressions.

2. ´Until the End of the World´ (*Achtung Baby*)

In *Surrender: 40 Songs One Story* (p. 266) Bono talks about the genesis of ´Until the End of the World´ stating it was inspired by the Wim Wenders film *Until the End of the World* and *The Book of Judas* by Brendan Kennelly. He recalls how he struggled to find a 'memorable melody' which resulted in him writing in a 'conversational mode', as a conversation with Jesus. 'The pitch of your voice determines the kind of vocabulary you can use in a song… I made a note to self: sing lower'. The conversation Bono has with Jesus about the 'end of the world' can be seen as drawing on the Jewish belief in the end times. In Jewish eschatology, the end of the world is when the Messiah comes, an event that will be heralded by the Levites as predicted in the Psalms and by the Hebrew prophets. In a live setting the 'mythical conversation' Bono has with Jesus in ´Until the End of the World´ is phrased as a question about the end of the world and what it means to engage with Biblical ideas that predict the coming of the Messiah.

The performative evolution of ´Until the End of the World´ exemplifies the dynamic interplay between text, performance, and reception in popular music. With over 600 live renditions, this song serves as a compelling case study for examining the mutability of meaning in rock performances, particularly those with explicit Biblical intertextuality. The imagery associated with ´Until the End of the World´ has changed over time, with Bono emphasising different lyrics to suit the narrative of the show. At the *Zoo TV Tour* Sydney show on 27 November 1993, Bono yells ´Hey Judas´ but changes the end of the first verse as if to deliberately signal that in this instance he is not singing about Judas and Jesus, but himself: ´Everybody having a good time / Except **you**´ changing the perspective at the end of the song ´Everybody having a good time / Except **me / I was** talking about the end of the world´ from 'you' to 'me'. Bono's lyrical alterations, shifting from ´you´ to ´me,´ demonstrate a sophisticated manipulation of narrative perspective. This rhetorical device serves to destabilise the assumed Biblical narrative, creating a dialogic tension between the song's ostensible subject (Judas and Jesus) and Bono's performed subjectivity. Simultaneously, on the screen above the stage there are images of explosions, combined with guitar effects mimicking carpet bombing, constructing a sensory experience that collapses Biblical time into the present, suggesting an immediate end-times scenario rather than a purely historical or futuristic one. This juxtaposition of apocalyptic imagery on screens within the song's performance creates what Samantha Bennett (2017) might describe as a

′multi-layered text′ in popular music production, illustrating the band's capacity to recontextualize Biblical narratives within a framework of postmodern performance aesthetics.

On the iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour, ′Until The End of the World′ was preceded by ′Raised By Wolves′, with the video screen above the stage reading 'JUSTICE FOR THE FORGOTTEN' (sic) showing images of the victims of the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Bono ended ′Raised By Wolves′ by aggressively ranting a version of Psalm 23: 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will feel no evil, thy rod and thy staff comfort me' as he strode forcefully down the runway kicking books that had been placed on the stage. He knelt, repeating ′Yay though I walk through the valley of the shadow, I will feel no evil, thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me′ then picked up one of the books and opened it repeating the phrase, ′comfort me′ several times, including once in French. This explicit use of Psalm 23 connects ′Until The End of the World′ with ′Love Rescue Me′, bringing another Jewish voice into the arena. He looked up and yelled 'comfort me' at the sky, yelling at God, tore the book he was holding and then threw it as he got up from his knees. He walked down the runway towards the main stage with his arms up, stopping halfway to sing the first verse of the song. Psalm 23 is traditionally recited at the funeral home (Leaman, 2022, p.23)

The emotion of this performance is laden with references that indicate a loss of faith—the singer cries out in anguish, the book is cast aside, pages ripped. The use of torn pages of the Bible could be sacrilegious but in the context of Bono's religiosity, tearing the pages indicates the words on the page are not Scripture but a literary version, the implication being that Peterson's version is literature, not a sacred religious text. Lisa Crafton and Deane Galbraith are convinced that the source of Bono's inspiration for the lyrics is the gospel of Matthew, but the torn pages released from the ceiling during UTEOTW, which rained down on the audience like confetti, were not of Matthew from the Christian *New Testament*, but from Eugene Peterson's rendition of the Psalms from his version of the Bible, *The Message,* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Records from fansite U2.com list the confetti pages of Psalm 41 to 143 with Christopher Jenkins suggesting that this ties in with the interpretations of the Psalms offered by C. S Lewis. While Bono is inspired by Peterson and his version of *The Message*, his is not the only voice in U2 and this elaborate production is the creative work of many people, not just the singer, and the meaning can be created according to how the audience

members read it.

3. ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ (*The Joshua Tree)*

´Bullet the Blue Sky´ has been performed live by U2 almost 800 times. When Steve Taylor wrote ´Bullet the Blue Sky As an Evolving Performance´, (Taylor, 2012, p. 87) the song had not been performed since 2006, although as Taylor noted it had previously been a mainstay of their live set for 19 years.

Bono says 'By the early 1990s, on the Zoo TV tour, I was lampooning the US administration nightly' (Bono, 2022, p. 196). This is evident in the video of Zoo TV in Sydney when the word 'Boom' appears on the screen, and televised images of crosses on fire as Bono sang ´See them burning crosses..´ There was a break then Bono lifted his hands, and as he lowered them swastikas were screened. Then The Edge launched into a guitar solo while Bono went off stage for a costume change and came back wearing an army flak jacket with Zoo TV on the back and an army-style baseball cap. He held a megaphone with an American flag printed on it, clapping on the beat, *one-two-two*, and the audience followed his lead. As he sang 'saxophone' he repeated the word as if to highlight the guitar with only the lights on the stage.

This version of ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ recorded in Chicago on September 20 and 21, 2005, for the Vertigo Tour reflected a different mood. Hurricane Katrina had happened three weeks earlier and on 21 September George Bush addressed the Republican Jewish Coalition 20th Anniversary Dinner. The Chicago performances of ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ sound slower and softer than the version from the Zoo TV tour. Bono wears a bell-sleeved leather-style jacket with stars on the sleeves and Coexist headband (which he puts on at the end of ´Love and Peace or Else´ and then bangs Larry's drum to bring in 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'). The Coexist has the Star of David in the middle of it, indicating ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ in this context is a clear commentary on the Middle East, although the band have never said as much.

During this performance of ´Sunday Bloody Sunday´ Bono slaps his arms as if to find a vein and shakes his head to mime a ´Don't do drugs´ message, making a connection to the song ´Running to Stand Still´ during which he mimics shooting up into his arm with a needle.

He says, ´Graffiti sprayed on a wall near here says Coexist´, then shrugs, raises his shoulders, raises eyebrows and chants: ´Jesus, Jew, Mohamed it's true´ while pointing at the different icons on the headband. Bono then sings 'All sons of Abraham. Father Abraham, Father Abraham look what you've done you've pitted your son against your son where are you now? Father Abraham. No more', a comment on historical conflicts between Abrahamic religions. By encouraging the audience to echo ´no more´, Bono transforms this performance into a collective plea for peace, showcasing U2's approach to addressing social and spiritual issues. Bono´s performance illustrates how Abrahamic religions have interpreted shared narratives, particularly the story of Isaac and Ishmael. Bakhos (2021, p. 296) explains that Jewish and Christian traditions have used these biblical figures to reinforce theological positions and define religious boundaries. In rabbinic literature, Isaac symbolises the chosen son, while Ishmael represents the outsider. Christian interpretations view Isaac as the 'new' covenant, with Ishmael representing the 'old'. The rabbinical interpretation of ´metsaḥeq´ (playing) in Genesis 21:9 further exemplifies this tendency. Its ambiguity has been exploited to cast Ishmael negatively, associating him with idol worship, violence, and immorality. This approach demonstrates how religious texts reinforce cultural and theological boundaries. Notably, while rabbinic sources used Ishmael to refer to non-Jews, Christian writers employed him as a cautionary example for other Christians. This difference highlights how religious narratives are adapted to serve various theological and social purposes.

The use of the Coexist logo is also an example of U2's appropriation of cultural and textual references from elsewhere. The Coexist design was developed by Piotr Młodożeniec for the Museum on the Seam in Jerusalem to represent tolerance, and the stylised 'CoeXist' logo was available in parts of America as a sticker from the chain store Trader Joe's, morphing into graffiti and being adopted by U2 (Edwards, Vox, 2016). Chad E Seales (2019, p 31) suggests the use of the "CoeXist" headband and the accompanying gestures are an example of Bono's 'revival techniques', resembling American evangelism. It may be that Bono is playing the Devil's advocate. The stage is bathed in red light, a device usually used for ´Where the Streets Have No Name´, then the band plays a snippet of ´Johnny Comes Marching Home Again´, and Bono repeats 'home' while dramatically clutching his head. When the Edge plays a guitar solo, Bono holds his arms crossed over his head. Then, with the headband over his eyes, he staggers towards the microphone and whispers, then sings 'These are the hands that built America, America' holding his hands up, lowering them as he again starts singing, ´When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again´.

The red light is used in the iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour during ´The Miracle of Joey Ramone´ when Bono sings ´I woke up´, signifying awakening in U2's visual language. This motif appears throughout their work, including in the songs ´Red Light´ (War) and ´The Electric Co´ (*Boy*) with the lyric, ´Red, running red / Play for real / Talk and feel´. In Hebrew, red is 'adom' and has many different meanings within biblical tradition. It is often associated with the ´evil inclination´ because Esau, according to the Midrash, is the evil twin who ´emerged red, like a hairy mantle all over´ (Genesis 25:25). However, red is also used to signify purity in the Hebrew Bible, as seen in Numbers 19:2: ´Hashem spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “This is the ritual law that G-d has commanded: Instruct the Israelite people to bring you a red cow without blemish, in which there is no defect and on which no yoke has been laid"´. This symbolic use of colour extends beyond red to encompass U2's broader visual palette in live performance, where specific colours carry contextual meaning that reinforces the band's thematic messaging.

While earlier video versions of ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ have been analysed by Steve Taylor and others, the song also appeared during the 2015 iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour allowing new staging and subsequent analysis. The DVD 'iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Live in Paris' shows The Edge playing ´October´ (*War*) on the piano while drone footage is shown of Kobani Syria in 2015, a city devastated by the effects of civil war, images of destroyed buildings, and streets strewn with rubble. The spotlight shines on Bono as he sings 'You go on' stretching out the word ‘on’ so that it reverberates as The Edge is handed his guitar and the band then rip into ´Bullet the Blue Sky´. Bono yells, ‘What do you want’ into the megaphone as he strides down the walkway from the main stage to the ‘e’ stage, the path lit with yellow lights running along both sides. Later, when he sings ‘Jacob wrestled the angel and the angel was overcome’ he crouches on one knee holding the blue megaphone with the stars of the European Union on the inside and outside in one hand, while his other hand behind his back has his fingers in a victory ‘V’. He sings while looking towards the screen, bringing attention to the images playing above him. Images of bodies floating in a star formation in a blue ocean are shown while Bono chants the tune of Beethoven’s ´Ode to Joy´. The lighting is yellow and blue, all the devices indicating that in this context the song is not about America, but Europe.

As noted in Chapter 3, the lyric ´Jacob wrestled the angel´ is a direct quote from the

Hebrew Bible and has many meanings within Jewish philosophy, revealed and hidden. Rabbi Sacks in his commentary on Genesis 32:4 says in the present day Jacob represents the Jewish people: ´For almost two thousand years Jews were looked down on as pariahs, yet they refused to internalise that image, just as Jacob refused to accept the hierarchies of power or affection that condemned him to be a mere second-best´, (Sacks, 2007) and chabad.org notes that some commentaries say the fight between Jacob and the angel represents the fight between Jews and their enemies, while Rabbi Ovadiah ben Jacob Sforno, a 16th-century Italian Rabbi and physician frames the struggle as symbolising the history of the Jewish people and ´the historical global struggle between the two philosophies´(sefaria.org). The recognition of the ´other´ as told through this version of ´Bullet The Blue Sky´ has particular resonance with this thought.

Dressed in a suit Bono mimics a televangelist as he rants: 'This boy comes up to me… a young man with a young man's blush, this boy, this boy looked a whole lot like… me, the boy looked just like me… He stuck his face into my face and he asked me "(have) you forgotten who you are? You forgotten where you come from? You're Irish but here you are making out with the powerful like you're really there for the powerless." He's pulling the dollar bills out of my hand, patting me down, patting me down, says I got way more than I need… He asks me, "can you see those fighter planes when you're flying on private planes?" Outside it's America.' He holds the microphone like a gun, as a heavily armed police line shows on the screen, then segues into ´19´ and says ´the other side of the barricade... And the boy keeps shouting "We don't want you in our revolution, you're part of the problem, not the solution."´ He repeats the line into the megaphone and launches into a chanted spoken word piece:

So I argue with the young man
That ideas deserve a plan
And to build a better world
It's going to take every woman and man
It's going to take you, me, the reds and the greens
The nows and forevers, the yet-to-bes
The where you going, the where you been
The living and the dead and the unseen
The somebodies, the nobodies

The who's who, gentile and the Jew
The gays and the straights to turn around the hate
The jailor and the free and the refugee

This addition to ´Bullet The Blue Sky´ explicitly references 'both sides' of debates about morality: the reds and the greens, the gays and the straights, 'the jailor and the free and the refugee'. While the sentiment that 'all sides' need to work to 'turn around the hate' is expressed, the explicit naming of 'the Jew', alongside the individuals Jesus and Mohammed, implies that *all* Jews have a collective responsibility, a concept that is contested even by the Jewish sages. Maimonides says there is a 'principle of collective responsibility' in the Genesis story known as Vayishlach. Nachmanides, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (1194–1270 CE), also known as Ramban, was a leading Torah scholar of the Middle Ages from Spain who authored commentaries on Torah and the Talmud. Nachmanides disagreed with Maimonides saying: 'The Noahide command to institute justice is a positive obligation to establish laws, courts and judges, but there is no principle of collective responsibility'. This has been debated by Jewish scholars ever since, with 20th century scholars such as Berkovits say, in 'Western religion' the three concepts of loving-kindness, justice and charity are incompatible as 'he who exercises lovingkindness and practices charity forgoes the implementation of justice' (Berkovits, 1969, Ch 5, par 125).

As the band finishes playing ´Bullet The Blue Sky´, instead of saying 'into the arms of America', Bono runs to the main stage and says, ´I am the boy, I run, I run… into your arms´, using his body and voice to ensure the message is delivered. The technique of staging the song in a particular way to give it meaning is evident when comparing the iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE performance with the version of ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ performed on the Joshua Tree Tour. ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ is the fourth song on *The Joshua Tree* album which was played in full at all shows. On the 2019 tour, the images on the screen behind the band were video footage of ordinary people standing in front of an American flag and putting helmets on. Each image holds for a few seconds while the stage is bathed in red and the spotlight shines on Bono from behind. When Bono sings ´La-la-la-la America´ and The Edge starts playing his guitar solo, the lighting of the band changes to white and blue, and then crooked video footage of the audience is shown on the screen from the band's on-stage perspective. This flipped perspective is a device U2 continues to use in live settings, perhaps as a physical indicator that there are different views according to where a person is located,

and that to understand the ‘other’ we need to first experience the world through their lens.

4. ´Staring at the Sun´ (*Pop*)

Songs from *Pop* rarely feature in U2’s live set, ´Staring At the Sun´ being the exception. ´Staring at the Sun´ is an example of how the performance of a song in a staged concert environment can be refined over a long period of time and new meaning attributed to it. ´Staring at the Sun´ has taken on elements of ritual in the live setting. ´Staring at the Sun´ was the second single from the Pop album and was played live on the PopMart Tour, Elevation (last performance in 2001). It then featured in one performance at a Bill Clinton event (see U2 gigs) on 15 October, 2011 at the Hollywood Bowl, Hollywood, California, USA and a newly staged version debuted in Tulsa in 2018 on the opening night of the eXPERIENCE + iNNOCENCE Tour, where it appeared as the 18th song on the setlist. The song is always performed as an acoustic duo by Edge and Bono. In early versions Bono also played the guitar, however after he had a bicycle accident in New York in 2014 he was no longer able to play, with the song subsequently performed as a solo guitar number by The Edge.

This is an example of a U2 song where the lines of what is a chorus and a verse are blurred. Each of the three times the ‘chorus’ is used differs slightly in the words, with the repetition beginning with a different line each time. The chorus starts with ‘I am’, then ‘to the ones’ then ‘you are’. This technique, also employed in ´One Tree Hill,´ allows for a nuanced progression of perspective throughout the song, shifting from a personal stance (´I'm not´) to a collective one (´To the ones´) and finally to a direct address (´You're not´).

First time: ´I’m not the only one Staring at the sun´
Second time: ´To the ones staring at the sun´
Third time: ´You're not the only one staring at the sun´

Then there are three obvious verses. The first starts with ‘Summer stretching on the grass’.

Stuck together with God's glue
It’s gonna get stickier too.
It’s been a long hot summer

Let's get under cover
Don't try too hard to think
Don't think at all.

The line ´Stuck together with God's glue´ is one of the few times 'God' is used explicitly in U2 lyrics, the verse encouraging belief and pure acceptance of God and his will, no matter how 'sticky' or difficult things are. This is a basic rule of both Judaism and Christianity, that believers might not know or understand God's will, but even when times are challenging, followers should accept that everything happens because of God. This lyrical approach aligns with the Jewish concept of ´emunah´, or faithfulness, which goes beyond mere belief to encompass a deep-seated trust in God's wisdom and providence. In Jewish thought, this acceptance is not passive but an active engagement with divine will, mirroring the song's encouragement to ´Don't try too hard to think / Don't think at all,´ which could be interpreted as an invitation to transcend rational understanding and embrace a more intuitive, faith-based perspective.

´Staring at the Sun´ was repurposed on the 2018 eXPERIENCE + iNNOCENCE Tour, replacing ´Bullet the Blue Sky´ on the set list, which had historically been used by U2 to comment on the foreign policy of the USA, and then on the iNNOCENCE + eXPERIENCE Tour to criticise the European Union's refugee policy. The use of ´Staring at the Sun´ gave the band an opportunity to comment on the state of the USA using a different metaphor. The song begins with The Edge and Bono on the small 'e' stage, with no visuals projected on the screen. It seems like a quiet spot in the setlist, serving as a bridge between the very personal ´You're the Best Thing About Me´ and the public ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´.

The live version of ´Staring At the Sun´ from the eXPERIENCE + iNNOCENCE Tour had video images that started playing just after the word 'intransigence' was shown on-screen. The footage is shocking and confronting: white Americans holding racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Islam signs, dressed in Nazi regalia and marching, some in KKK hoods. The song ends with Bono singing an elongated 'i-i-i-i-i-i' as the screen darkens, a comment on the 'I-ness' of society, particularly in the context of the blatant consumerism of Pop and popular culture. This vocal gesture is followed by the chiming opening guitar chords of ´Pride (In the Name of Love)´, signalling the juxtaposition of anti-American with pro-American sentiment. Whereas ´Staring At the Sun´ performed acoustically does not invite participation, ´Pride (In

the Name of Love)′ serves as a call to action, and provides a physical release through communal singing. The invitation of the leader is not required as everyone knows the line “in the name of love” and recognises the cue to join in.

Bono admitted that there was no particular order to the lyrics of ′Staring At the Sun′, instead he put random words and phrases together to fit with melody, so it follows that while some words have resonance with Biblical themes, these are not necessarily clear or consistent, and there is no direct quotation. Although there is no explicit link between the lyrics of ′Staring at the Sun′ and the Hebrew Bible, there is a sense of intertextuality, in the way spirituality, longing and belonging are expressed in the lyrics, which have resonance with Rabbinic sources such as Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Luntschitz aka ′Kli Yakar′ (1550–1619) on Genesis 22:4:1 who says, ‘A person is able to stare at the sun from afar, but not from close. For the sense of vision does not have the ability to stare at the sun when it is close to a person… Likewise, did Moshe say (Exodus 3:3), ‘Allow me to turn aside, and I shall see, etc.’ ‘Allow me to turn aside’, meaning to say, to move away from the holy place, and not to be close to it. And all of this is in order to see [it]. And likewise, did Yirmiyah say (Jeremiah 31:3), "From afar did the Lord appear" - it is implied, but not from close.’ ′Staring at the Sun′ is a commentary on people turning away, not facing what is happening in front of them to their country, in front of their own eyes.

On the original recorded version of ′Staring at the Sun′ (released as a single in 1997), the lyrics are:

Intransigence in all around
Military's still in town
Armour plated suits and ties
Daddy just won't say goodbye
Referee won't blow the whistle.
God is good but will he listen?
I'm nearly great but there's something missing.

The Hebrew texts consistently affirm that God is 'good', a fundamental tenet in Jewish theology. This concept of divine benevolence is intrinsically linked to the idea of God as a listener, particularly attentive to the prayers and pleas of the faithful. This notion of a

responsive deity is vividly illustrated in several Psalms. For instance, Psalm 39 in the *Koren Jerusalem Bible* implores: ´Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; keep not silence at my tears: for I am a stranger with Thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.´ Similarly, Psalm 54 echoes this sentiment: ´Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth.´ These passages underscore the Jewish belief in a God who is not distant or aloof, but rather intimately engaged with the supplications of His people.

The theme of divine listening in ´Staring at the Sun´ creates an intertextual connection within U2's own catalogue, particularly referencing the lyric in ´Gloria´ from their album October: ´Oh Lord, loosen my lips´. This self-referential quality not only demonstrates thematic consistency across U2's work but also circles back to the band's origin story when Bono, The Edge and Larry Mullen Jnr were deeply engaged with Christian fellowship and Biblical study. This recurring motif of communication with the divine, from ´Gloria´ to ´Staring at the Sun´, reflects the enduring impact of U2's spiritual roots on their musical journey, even as their approach to expressing these themes has evolved over time.

5. ´Walk On´ (All That You Can't Leave Behind)

´Walk On´ (*All That You Can't Leave Behind*, 2000) was dedicated to Aung San Suu Kyi and won the Grammy Award for Record of the Year at the 44th Grammy Awards. U2 became aware of Aung San Suu Kyi's plight in March 2000 when they were awarded the Freedom of the City of Dublin. The song has sometimes been dedicated to other icons by the band and the media, as when a video was created by MTV as a tribute to the victims, families, friends and heroes of September 11 2001 and was also used as the opening song of 2002 Grammys. U2gigs.com records ´Walk On´ as being performed more than 250 times. During the Vertigo Tour it appeared rarely, usually in an acoustic format. The last time it was played by the full band according to U2.com was at the final show of the 360° Tour, on July 30 2011 at the Magnetic Hill Music Festival Site, Moncton, New Brunswick Canada.

During the 360° Tour from 2009 to 2011, U2 invited activist groups including the ONE Campaign and Amnesty International to set up stalls on the venue grounds and allowed their volunteers to move freely within the venues to gather signatures for various petitions. At each show some of these volunteers were rewarded with an on-stage role promoting Amnesty International and Aung San Suu Kyi as the band played ´Walk On´. In several cities,

audience members were asked to print out and bring along Aung San Suu Kyi face masks. Concert footage shows how effective this call to action was, with thousands of fans holding the masks to create a sea of her face reflected at the band. In Australia, ONE Campaign volunteers were given iPads for audience members to log their details to sign the petition. This was an effective way for ONE to build a database and claim a large global membership to assist with their campaigning. The volunteers were told those who collected the most signatures would get to 'walk on' the stage. The winners were announced by the ONE coordinators shortly before the show started, with those chosen then taken to a backstage area to practice walking in time holding the large Amnesty lanterns and given instructions about their cues to walk on and off stage.

In *Christianity Today* (2016) Steve Stockman wrote, ´On the Elevation tour (2001) that followed, most nights would end with the song "Walk On" and Bono getting the crowd to sing "hallelujah" while he declared, "The Spirit is in the house."' Stockman's reading is that these signs have resonance with evangelical Christianity, but a more nuanced Jewish perspective identifies the symbolic words are derived from the Hebrew Bible and Jewish practice. As noted in Chapter 3 the lyrics and intention of ´Walk On´ have resonance with Psalm 82 and the song can be read as being about man's injustice towards man (or woman) and how God will judge them, as in Psalm 82:5, *Koren Jerusalem Bible* version: ´They know not, nor do they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are shaken.´ (לֹא יָדְעוּ ו וְלֹא יָבִינוּ בַּחֲשֵׁכָה יִתְהַלָּכוּ יִמֹּוטוּ כָּל־מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ:). The 'foundations of the earth' are the physical earth, spirituality and the political and social structures of our society, and the world exists because of three things: truth, justice and peace (Feuer, 2013 p.1035), all of which were missing when Aung San Suu Kyi was under house arrest. The Talmud designates Psalm 82 as the Song of the Day for the third day of the week, with Maharasah (Rosh Hashanah 31a) explaining that the continued existence of the earth depends on the maintenance of equity and justice. In this context, it can be said, ´Love is not an easy thing´ for God to have for humanity when truth, justice and peace are lacking, and ´Walk On´ is a plea for humans to keep trying, and for God to not abandon humanity.

Following the 360° Tour when ´Walk On´ was so explicitly used to promote the cause of Aung San Suu Kyi, the song was not performed by U2 until it was 'repurposed' to fit a newer global narrative about justice, truth and peace. A version released on April 8 for the #StandUpForUkraine social media rally contained new lyrics specifically referring to

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ´Walk On´ (April 8, 2022):

And if the comic takes the stage
And no one laughs
And does a dance on his own grave
For a photograph
This is not a curtain call
This is the greatest act of all
A stand up for freedom

It was then performed by Bono and the Edge for a group of Ukrainian soldiers on 8th May 2022 in Kyiv, Ukraine, at the Khreschatyk Metro Station, when the two visited the war zone at the invitation of Zelensky:

And if the dancer on the street
Wears a veil of tears
It's a dance no army can defeat
Love turns her fears
Into a kind of rage
That can't be kept inside a cage
You fight or you fly
We're born or we die
For freedom

All that you fashion
All that you make
All that you build
Whatever they break
All that you dream up
All you design
All that you can't leave behind

All that you reckon
All that you dare

All that you fought for
When it wasn't there
All that you summit
The hills that you climb

The darkness that keeps 'us' apart is an allegory of the misdeeds of humans towards other humans, expressed in this song as concern for freedom, safety and home as none of these things is possible without justice. The repurposed lyrics of ′Walk On′ employ metaphorical imagery that can be analysed through biblical parallels. The April 2022 version presents Zelensky through the metaphor of ′comic takes the stage′ who ′does a dance on his own grave,′ depicting the transformation of a public entertainer to wartime leader. This transformation narrative bears similarities to biblical patterns where unlikely individuals assume leadership roles in times of crisis.

In the May 2022 version, the central metaphor shifts to ′the dancer on the street′ wearing ′a veil of tears,′ creating a deliberate contrast between dance and mourning that reflects similar juxtapositions found in Psalm 30:12: ′You turned my lament into dancing, you undid my sackcloth and girded me with joy′. The progression from personal grief to collective resistance (′a dance no army can defeat′) demonstrates how individual experience is elevated to represent communal struggle. The structural element of repetition in the phrase ′All that you...′ reflects the use of parallelism common in biblical poetry, particularly in Psalms. This device serves to build intensity through accumulation while contrasting human acts of creation (′fashion,′ ′make,′ ′build,′ ′dream,′ ′design′) with destruction (′whatever they break′). The metaphorical framework thus establishes a narrative of resistance through creativity and persistence, themes that appear frequently in biblical texts dealing with persecution and survival.

6. The Edge's Sistine Chapel Performance

On April 29, 2016, The Edge became the first rock artist to stage a contemporary music concert at the Sistine Chapel in Rome, where as a board member of the Angiogenesis Foundation he was taking part in Cellular Horizons, a three-day conference at the Vatican on regenerative medicines. The Edge was the first popular musician to perform in the Chapel and only the second musician ever to use a musical instrument in the sacred Christian space

as historically instruments were not permitted to be played inside the Chapel. The four songs chosen for the performance all have a clear connection with the Hebrew Bible's significant themes of freedom and faith.

Sistine Chapel performance setlist:

´If It Be Your Will´ (Cohen)
´Yahweh´ (U2)
´Ordinary Love´ (U2)
´Walk On´ (U2)

The Vatican City is the home of the Catholic Church whose influence on civic and political life in Ireland was still strong when the members of U2 were growing up. The influence waned since, as evidenced by the passage of abortion rights legislation and marriage equality which would have been unthinkable in the 1970s. The horror of child abuse by Catholic priests is addressed in U2's ´Sleep Like a Baby Tonight´ (*Songs of Innocence*). The Edge, who divorced his first wife Aislinn O'Sullivan and subsequently married a Jewish woman, Morleigh Steinberg, became involved in the Angiogenesis Foundation because of his daughter, Sian's cancer diagnosis in 2006. As Sian is Jewish through her mother's line, the layered implications of The Edge's performance at the Sistine Chapel are magnified in the historical context of the Catholic Church's historical rejection of both divorce and Jews. From the Middle Ages the Catholic Church openly oppressed Jews, through institutionalised antisemitism and a policy of forced conversions, expulsions and pogroms. It took until 1965, some 20 years after the Holocaust, for the Catholic Church to finally issue the document *Nostra Aetate* which condemned antisemitism and recognised the shared heritage of Jews and Christians, formally rejecting Jewish deicide, the long-held narrative that the Jews as a people were collectively responsible for the death of Jesus. In 2015, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews released a theological reflection (2015) 'calling on Christians to "bear witness to their faith in Jesus Christ ... in a humble and sensitive manner' to Jewish people, acknowledging that Jews were 'participants in God's salvation'.

The Edge says the Beatles and 'Church singing' were two major influences, ´it was when I would go with my parents back to Wales, we would go to chapel and have this experience of hearing an entire Welsh congregation singing hymns in perfect four-part harmony.

Literally the hairs on the back of my neck went up because it's so unbelievably powerful.′ (Bain, 2016). 'Literature and religion were the two most important shaping influences of human culture in the West until the scientific revolution, with its initial conception of a mechanical universe, undermined the hitherto generally accepted notion that the human mind participated in an inherently meaningful cosmos (Zimmermann, 2016, p. 102). The scientific mind of the Edge is seen in the words he wrote for a lithograph sold on U2.com:

> ′The Big Bang was of the perfect strength to cause the creation of the universe as we know it. Any stronger and the force of expansion would have made the formation of matter impossible, the energy of The Big Bang would have continued outwards in the form of radio waves. Any less powerful and the pull back to the centre caused by gravity would have instantly sucked everything blown out back into the tiny pinpoint where it all started. That this occurred has made possible the formation of all matter in the form of gas—the substance of all stars, and all other substances liquids and solids, the threshold for the existence of matter is so tiny that the existence of the universe is either the greatest fluke imaginable or the inevitable?′

This description of the 'Big Bang' aligns with the following transcription of Genesis 1:1 to describe the beginning of existence: ′At the dawn of time, the Cosmic Harmony sparked the energies of existence, giving birth to the cosmos and our world′ from *The Philosophical Tanakh, The Contemporary Torah* (Jewish Publication Society, 2006). As Friedmann notes, people of the Near East, including the Jews, believed the world was formed by chaos, not by ′nothingness′ (Friedmann, 2014, p. 60). The Edge's explanation of the interaction between forces and energy aligns with this ancient Hebrew understanding of creation as an organising principle rather than creation ex nihilo.

The opening song performed by the Edge was by Leonard Cohen, a Jewish musician, sung word perfectly according to the printed song lyrics. Performing ′If It Be Your Will′ in this venue echoes Cohen's spirituality, which many believe transcended formal religion, and highlights his musical influence on the Edge. In 2005 the Edge was interviewed by MTV documentary-maker Benjamin Wagner about U2's involvement in Lian Lunson's Cohen film *I'm Your Man,* with the Edge saying, 'If you're a lyric fan, as I am, when you hear a Leonard Cohen song, it's like every word is so perfectly placed, and chosen, it just connects in a very deep way.' (Wagner, 2006).

′If It Be Your Will′ was first made available on Cohen's 1984 album *Various Positions*, which also included the popular work, ′Hallelujah′. Friedman notes songs that the songs on this album all 'sound' Biblical in *Leonard Cohen: The Mystical Roots of Genius* (2021) finding ′If It Be Your Will′ is almost the same as the introduction in the Hebrew prayer book which is, ′May It Be Your Will.′ Cohen described ′If It Be Your Will′ as a personal prayer, although it has been noted that while many of its phrases have a biblical resonance, none is a direct quote from scripture. Lebold notes it is one of the 'very explicit prayers' (Lebold, 2018, p. 10) from *Various Positions*. Doron Cohen suggests that using ′If′ rather than ′May′ relates the song to Jesus, however, Cohen did not ever confirm this association, and when asked by an Israeli TV interviewer, Dan Margalit, in 1985 if his songs were becoming more Jewish, Cohen answered, 'My songs are always Jewish. They can't be anything else but Jewish.' The lyrics of ′If It Be Your Will′ exhibit ambiguity regarding who the song is addressed to, a device frequently employed by U2, and proclaiming 'if it be your will' in a Jewish context means an acknowledgement of the eternal presence of God.

The second song performed by the Edge was ′Yahweh′ from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* which was released on November 22, 2004, however there is no audio or video recording of this performance of song available. ′Yahweh′ was played on the Vertigo tour but has not been performed live by the full band since. An online blog called 'Rorate Caeli' pointed out that on June 29, 2008, The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments reminded Catholics that the name of God in the form of the tetragrammaton YHWH is not to be ′used or pronounced′ in the liturgical celebrations, in songs and prayers." The use by the Edge of the tetragrammaton YHWH, forbidden in liturgical Catholic contexts, therefore has additional layers of complexity. Furthermore, the term 'Yahweh' is not traditionally used by Jews but is prevalent among evangelical Christians. The song's lyrics, ′Take this soul, stranded in some skin and bones, take this soul and make it sing′; the chorus, ′Yahweh, Yahweh, always pain before a child is born,′ alludes to the pain of creation and birth and serves as a metaphor for the challenges of spiritual growth and transformation. ′Yahweh′ also contains the lyric ′if it be your will′, connecting it to the Cohen song.

Edge then dedicated the U2 song ′Ordinary Love′ to his father who had passed away the week before. Released in November 2013, ′Ordinary Love′ was written for the biopic *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom and* was nominated for Best Original Song at the 2014

Academy Awards, and the 2014 Golden Globe Awards, the latter of which it won. ´Ordinary Love´ has not appeared on a U2 album and apart from this performance by the Edge has only been played once by U2, in October 2017 for a recording of a Brazilian TV show. This could be seen as the Edge seeing his father as being 'free' in death, and of Mandela's freedom. There are two different versions of published lyrics for ´Ordinary Love´ and it is unclear which lyrics the Edge used, but in the original lyric, ´I can't fight you any more, it's you I'm fighting for´ the ´you´ can be God, a lover of all humanity, with an overall message being we need to love one another before we can ´reach higher´.

Ending the set was ´Walk On´, another song ostensibly about freedom, performed with a choir of young Irish people and dedicated by the Edge to the Pope. As mentioned, it was initially written for Aung San Suu Kyi, the song ´Walk On´ includes lyrics ´a singing bird in an open cage who will only fly for freedom´ which resonates strongly as a call to action to fans and world leaders to take action to help the needy. In this context the image can also be seen as a coded reference to the influence of the Catholic Church and the restrictions placed on its adherents, and an acknowledgement that all people deserve to be free to practice their religion and express their beliefs without persecution.

The Edge's Sistine Chapel performance exemplifies the complex intertextuality between U2's music and religious texts, particularly the Hebrew Bible. This event can be analysed through Lacasse's definitions of intertextuality in popular music, where both quotation and allusion are evident. Cohen's ´If It Be Your Will´, with its clear connections to Jewish prayer, represents a form of quotation, while ´Yahweh´ demonstrates engagement with Jewish scriptural themes and language. Occurring in a significant Catholic setting, this performance highlights the interplay between Jewish and Christian influences in U2's music. The use of the tetragrammaton YHWH in ´Yahweh´, where such utterances are traditionally prohibited, raises questions about U2's approach to sacred texts and names. The Edge's personal connection to Judaism through his family adds another layer to this analysis. This event reflects a broader pattern in U2's work, incorporating elements from the Hebrew Bible alongside Christian themes. The band's use of biblical imagery and language, as evidenced in this setlist, continues to evolve from their early, more explicitly Christian-influenced works to more nuanced engagements with multiple religious traditions, demonstrating how their spiritual expression has become increasingly inclusive while maintaining deep textual connections to biblical sources alongside their diverse musical and cultural influences.

CHAPTER 7: Conclusion

My thesis is the first in-depth scholarly exploration of the relationship between U2's music and the Hebrew Bible and provides a framework for future research. I tested a number of approaches and methodologies to reveal the connection between U2 and the Hebrew Bible within a textual and musical context. I found that by identifying common words and phrases that are contained in U2's lyrics and the Hebrew Bible and examining their literal and symbolic meanings, and how they were articulated in live performance, I could ascribe additional meaning and a more nuanced understanding to the way the songs are received by audiences with different characteristics and beliefs.

The primary purpose of this research project was to find the connections between the music of U2 and the Hebrew Bible, adding to the existing scholarship about U2, and popular music in general. Until now references to the Hebrew Bible in scholarship about U2 have been largely made by Christian scholars whose research reflects their own cultural and religious frame. I examined these academic texts and accessed some of the vast troves of Jewish scholarship to determine if there were additional meanings that could be attributed to U2's songs that can explain why non-Christians can find their music 'spiritual' and moving. I found there is explicit referencing to the Hebrew Bible in Bono's overt lyrical use of the Psalms, which continues the Jewish tradition of incorporating fragments of Psalms in music used in communal prayers and synagogue services. In addition, through this study I determined that there are layers of intertextuality that create ambiguity and support the application of multiple meanings in interpreting U2's work.

I considered methodologies developed by popular music scholars including Laurie Burns, Allan F. Moore, William Moylan and Richard Middleton. I used quantitative research methods to collate and sort the published lyrics of approximately 200 original U2 songs to determine the explicit and covert Biblical references, using the data to determine where there was a significant representation of the Hebrew Bible. Due to travel restrictions imposed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible for me to travel and develop relationships with subject matter experts to test my theories as I had originally planned. Instead, I relied on desktop research, including reading and listening to interviews in mainstream media and music press, as well as specialist technical music magazines. I used

Jewish translations of the Hebrew Bible, and supplementary rabbinical texts, and referred to Jewish practice to add meaning to the Biblical words and ideas used in U2's recorded work and live performance.

The release of Bono's memoir *Surrender* (2022) was timely for this research as it provided a fair amount of written reflection that supported my theory about the long-standing influence of the Hebrew Bible on him and the other band members. However, without first person interviews, I used all of this material with some caution as mainstream autobiographies and interviews given by U2 are primarily undertaken to promote the band in a manner that the members want themselves to be perceived.

In constructing a methodology I undertook a quantitative analysis of U2's lyrics, examining Biblical references in song words and their context, entire songs, and the live performances of individual songs. I found strong historical rabbinical sources that allowed for the attribution of additional meaning to these words and therefore the songs. By identifying and analysing words that frequently appear in both U2's lyrics and the Hebrew Bible texts I found there is a connection between the form and style of U2's songs, and how vocal music and Biblical words are used in Jewish worship. For example, the word 'soul' which appears in Judeo-Christianity via the Hebrew Bible, signifies the personal in Jewish prayer as it does in U2's songs.

Scope was a significant issue as U2's work is enormous and distinctions between Christianity and Judaism and where these two religions intersect in modernity are complex and require deep theological and sociological analysis that do not fit within the parameters of this research. By narrowing the parameters I was able to establish a nuanced connection between the Hebrew Biblical and the music of U2 by adding a Jewish perspective. I also found that considering the context of the song and applying a personal frame of reference can add nuance and meaning and even establish a symbiotic link with a different religion and culture than the songwriter and performers. Through this research, I determined that it is not possible to ascribe a singular, explicit form of religion or spirituality to U2 as a collective, or to their works overall. I did find a significant relationship between U2's lyrics and the words used in the primary Jewish text, the Hebrew Bible, and how they are used in Jewish practice, and identified approaches that can be used to ascribe additional meaning to U2's songs by relating them to the way the words of the Bible are used in Jewish worship.

Music has a significant place in Jewish culture and practice. It both reflects and is reflective of the place where the community exists. There is evidence in the Hebrew Bible of instruments being played in worship ceremonies and to mark significant events and celebrations, however there is no definitive evidence of what music was performed in biblical times when the Hebrew Temple stood in Jerusalem because there was no written notation. Nevertheless, there are cantillation marks in the Torah scrolls, and written descriptions of instruments, as well as the oral and musical traditions of Jewish diaspora communities that researchers have to establish a continuous connection with the use of music and words from Hebrew Bible over the past 2,000 years.

One of the findings of this research is that the influences of the Hebrew Bible can be seen strongly throughout U2's work, in the lyrical style and the intertextual quotations, explicitly in ´40´ and ´Love Rescue Me´, and as a hint or allusion in many other songs. When Bono discusses the Psalms as a major influence it is often when he is talking to Christians and Christian publications, which supposes a spiritually one-dimensional viewpoint. However, there is ample evidence that he recognises the Hebrew Bible is a Jewish text and Jews are the original knowledge holders. It therefore follows that a Jewish interpretation of U2's songs is just as valid as a Christian one, if not more so, as Judaism underpins Christianity.

The primary Biblical connection is with U2 and the Psalms, and incorporating fragments of Psalms is a Jewish tradition. In Jewish practice fragments of the Psalms are set to music and used in rituals and services in communal prayers and synagogues and are also used by secular Jewish songwriters such as Leonard Cohen and others in their popular secular songs. This analytical method does not apply to all U2 songs, as many of their songs do not have lyrics with any connection to the Hebrew Bible, but it is an approach that shows the influence the Hebrew Bible has on many aspects of modern popular culture, in ways that are both explicit and implied, because scriptural references are so embedded in our society´s language that the original source is often largely obscured.

Overall, I found that while using the traditional Western notation musicology style of analysis can be useful when deconstructing popular songs to understand how to score or play them, it does little to amplify the meaning or understand how that meaning is created. Knowing the context, that is, who wrote the song, when, why and what the intended meaning

is, gives much greater depth to the piece and its position as a work of significance, as I demonstrated through the case studies.

Bono is not a prophet or a priest, nor does he claim to be either of these. He has articulated his belief in God and credits Jewish sources and thought as one of his primary sources of inspiration and has been a feature of U2's work for more than 40 years. How this vision is seen and heard by the listener allows for an individual interpretation of the meaning of the songs, allowing U2 to resonate with audiences of many religions and equally with those who have no religion at all. I will leave the last words about this to Bono who said: ´Freedom is a word we throw about… the way we look around the world we're just trying to find the one word we want to hold onto the most. I think it might be freedom. Rock 'n' roll is the sound of freedom. Liberation. Politically, sexually, spiritually. Freedom. And that's all I wanted to say about what's going on in the world right now, let's hold on to that very tightly; don't let anyone take that away from you.´

Freedom to feel and hear and see U2's songs and message in whatever way we choose is all of those things, and allows some of us to make some sense out of the world.

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1 Corinthians 15:16

Isaiah 6:3

Ezekiel 3: 12

Exodus 3:4

Ezekiel 17:3-4

Psalm 42:9

Psalm 92

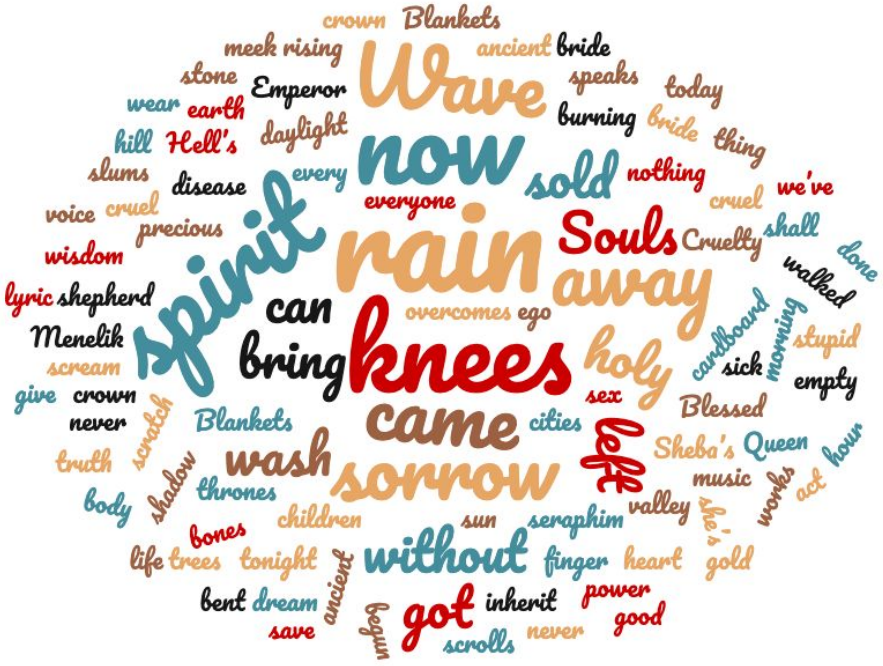
Numbers 6:23-26

Appendix 1: Word Clouds (for illustrative purposes only)

´Always´

´Beautiful Day´

´Wave of Sorrow (Birdland)´



´Indian Summer Sky´