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Zuzana Kvetanová reflects on issues concerning media construction of reality with regard to problems of gender stereotyping, violence and sexism in audio-visual production, applying narratological and discursive analytical procedures. She connects these individual areas of interest with the issue of late modern narcissism and society-wide cultural changes in the 21st century. Zuzana Kvetanová is also interested in the terminological framework of digital game studies, using interdisciplinary techniques that include the perspectives of cultural anthropology, media historiography, sociology, social philosophy and psychology. She is the deputy Editor-in-Chief of the academic journal *Acta Ludologica*.

THE FILM INDUSTRY AND ITS CRITICAL REFLECTIONS IN BIOGRAPHICAL DRAMAS

Lenka RUSŇÁKOVÁ – Zuzana KVETANOVÁ

ABSTRACT:

The film genre called *biographical drama* (abbreviated as *biopic*) focuses on depicting the unique fates and professional achievements or failures of public figures, including popular figures in the music industry. Given the long-term success of these film narratives, there is a need to explore biographical audiovisual narratives about musicians of the past and present. The main aim of the study, therefore, is to elucidate the conventional genre patterns and iconography of the film genre of biographical drama in the form of a critical reflection on feature films, contemporary biopics from the music industry that resonate in the world of cinema. To fulfil the stated aim, the first step is to explain key concepts and processes closely related to the issue at hand. In a follow-up case study, we explain the ways in which the music industry collaborates with the film industry in the application of qualitative content (narrative) analysis of selected research materials. We work on the assumption that biographical dramas about music personalities have the potential to create financially and audience successful media content, reaching relatively high qualitative levels, despite their generally low reputation by the professional public. This assumption opens up a debate about ways of working with the relevant genre iconography. We are also interested in answering the question of how and whether the meaning of the presented facts changes to dramatize the plot, and to what extent the examined film narratives referring to real life stories of selected persons fulfil their informative-educational character. In fact, we believe that the representation of reality in the media reality (represented by audiovisual images of the described genre) is modified to a certain extent. For this reason, we consider it necessary to approach the interpretation of cinematic works in a critical manner.

KEY WORDS:

biographical drama, biopic, film genre, film industry, film narrative, genre iconography, informative-educational function of biopics, media audiences, media (film) education, music industry, media reality

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1 Introduction: Biographical Dramas of Important Personalities and Their Iconography

Film genres provide a starting point for the study, analysis and evaluation of films. Their importance lies in the fact that they allow us to categorise and identify audiovisual works according to their specific elements. Each film genre has its own characteristics and conventions shaped by social, cultural and historical factors. Horror films, for example, appeal by inducing fear and tension in media audiences, using dark settings, supernatural elements or various forms of violence. Comedies, on the other hand, focus on humour and distraction of the viewer, mostly through absurd situations, exaggerated characters and comic dialogue. However, film genre studies not only study individual genres, but also their development and interconnections. It focuses, for example, on how genres change over time, and reflects on the extent to which and whether there is actually genre syncretism (e.g., the science fiction genre tends to merge with action or horror to create a new, original work). In addition, film genre studies contributes to the cultural and media literacy of media audiences by enabling them to understand the specific conventions and expectations that accompany different film genres. In this way, recipients can more easily interpret the meaning of media content within a broader socio-cultural context.

The prominent position of the film genre of biographical drama in cinema and its current popularity with the audience have narrowed the object of our investigation to this type of film. Indeed, biographical drama depicts the personal stories of real people, their successes, ups, downs and challenges. It also has the ability to “bring to life” various historical realities and set them in an audiovisual environment. For this reason, the present text is devoted to elucidating the conventional genre patterns and iconography of the biopic film genre, and assessing its relevance in 21st century cinema. We are interested in how the different genre elements collectively create a specific formula that makes this type of media content more easily identifiable and interpretable by recipients.

Following the main objective of the study, we focus on the definition of biographical drama as a unique film genre that presents complex narratives of individual or collective success, fame, and the professional and personal lives of selected personalities. Biographical drama is essentially a specific sub-type of film drama inspired by true events. Bergan (2008) states that it is a partly fictionalised, dramatized portrayal of a famous or otherwise important person. However, the film may also indirectly refer to a real person portrayed by a fictional character. Regardless of the degree of factuality of biopics, we argue that the dramaturgical narrative structure of such a film is quite conventional. The protagonist faces complications or personal tragedies, must overcome many obstacles, risk money, family happiness or their own life in order to succeed. After these events, a period marked by misfortune and conflict ensues. Paradoxically, this is followed by a life phase filled with success, which is mostly replaced again by disappointment and regret (for more information, see Radošinská & Rusňáková, 2023; Radošinská & Kvetanová, 2024). The narrative structure of the work, built on the representation of the “ups and downs” of a particular person, allows for the portrayal of the character as an extraordinary personality who has come to public attention for various reasons (e.g., unique talents, interpersonal relationships, scandals, controversial lifestyle, tragic fate). Thus, a biopic generally depicts the entire life of a famous person from the past or present, or focuses on the presentation of a defined period of time (compared to Radošinská et al., 2020; Točená et al., 2022; Radošinská et al., 2023).

Another typical iconographic feature of the analysed genre is the depiction of the tension between the individual and established moral, cultural and social norms. Such images tend to depict a “great personality” and function as a kind of “ode” to their achievements, extraordinary character or talent. The narrative focuses primarily on portraying the crisis situations in the life of the person being pilloried (e.g., health problems, addictions, toxic interpersonal relationships, scandals), which intersect with their achievements (Bingham, 2010). Biographical dramas are similarly characterised by linearity and the accumulation of factual data, arranged in a certain frame structure, with the director attempting to present only those snippets of a person’s life that highlight their greatness and the extent of their fame (Custen, 1992). The narrative structure is essentially constructed in accordance with Bergan’s definition of the biopic as a particular type of film drama, as outlined above. Specifically, we are talking about the three-act narrative model, or the American three-act structure. *Act I* introduces the space and time in which the story is situated, and last but not

least introduces the hero/heroine of the story, often already in their early childhood. At that point, a series of obstacles that the main character must overcome to reach their goal are hinted at. However, we encounter a situation where biopics begin *in medias res* and the viewer cannot expect a deeper depiction of the childhood and upbringing of the interviewee, which are often the reason for their later career or personal problems. The filmmakers mostly select the events in question and apply a considerable degree of simplification, or the initially chronological plot is supplemented with flashbacks, for example, to show the influence of events from a person's early childhood on the situation they are currently in (Bignell, 2020). Because of the dramatization of the plot, the above production procedure is perceived as the most effective, although it often omits several elements (especially experiences related to early childhood) that may have influenced the further development of the main character's life (Neale, 2000). *Act II* is preceded by *Plot Point I*, typically the hero's/heroine's direct confrontation with some serious life situation or work obstacle. This part of the story is characterised by losses, bad decisions or missteps of the main character, who experiences regret, disappointment or loneliness. In the second act, new secondary characters also appear. These play out their own plots, while plot referents familiar from the first act continue to develop. At that point, however, the hero/heroine is yet to face their most difficult tests. As soon as the protagonist realises the impasse of the situation, they are in, they re-evaluate most of their previous decisions, seek to make amends, and thus *Plot Point II* occurs. The above sequence of events has a single goal – the hero/heroine must learn from their mistakes, because only in this way they can conclude their story. The ensuing *Act III* represents a form of resolution, when the central character is “corrected” or “reconciled” to their fate (Rusňáková, 2019). This final part of the narrative tends to be supplemented in biographical works by plot sequences with a distinctly cathartic character (e.g., memorial photographs, statements by family and loved ones, authentic footage).

In the present study, we focus on biographical dramas that reflect the extraordinary lives of music personalities, with the intention of outlining the synergy between the film industry and the music business. These types of media content are currently perceived as globally popular works, mainly because they use music as an important narrative tool, iconographic element and dramatizing factor. Since we intend to discuss biographical drama focusing on music celebrities, it is also necessary to highlight the fact that virtually all feature films of the thematic focus described here are one-off titles and thus do not, for the most part, have any type of seriality associated with them. For this reason, these audiovisual works tend to offer more elaborate storylines and deeper psychological portrayals of the main characters – artists (Schatz, 2009). At the same time, biographical films about musical figures contain easily identifiable connotations and grand, spectacular visuals related to, for example, stage musical performances. The filmmakers' ability to incorporate music into the narrative structure of the work subsequently adds to its atmosphere and helps to further dramatize the plot. The outlined synergy between the film and music industries, materialised in the form of a biopic, is perceived as a certain prerequisite for its future commercial success (for more information, see Kvetanová & Rusňáková, 2023).

Many film critics are still hesitant to acknowledge biographical drama as a separate, fully-fledged genre, even though several biopics produced, as well as those referencing major figures in the music industry, have achieved international popularity and won numerous awards (Minier & Pennacchia, 2016). We see that although works of this genre classification have long been associated with a generally low reputation (Radošinská et al., 2022), in the translated study we work with the assumption that biographical music dramas clearly have the potential to produce qualitatively valuable and extremely profitable audiovisual titles. This assumption opens up the debate on whether biographical films preserve the relevant genre iconography and how (if at all) the meaning of the presented facts is altered in order to dramatize the plot. With reference to the relationship between the subject matter (the life story of personalities past or present) and the related cinematic narrative, we argue that biopics always distort the reality they portray in some way, and that it is therefore necessary to approach their interpretation with particular caution. In this context, we emphasise the importance of media (film) education when trying to critically evaluate the content and form of audiovisual works (Rusňáková & Prostináková Hossová, 2022). In fact, the discussion of the presented topics in a broader socio-cultural context, the identification of film genres, styles, narrative-dramatization factors in selected media content and the development of the media audience's ability to think critically becomes the goal of media (film) education and also a prerequisite for a proper understanding of the represented facts in relation to media (film) reality (for more information on media education, media literacy and its research in the context of audiovisual production,

see Vrabec, 2015; Hossová & Hekelj, 2018; Kačínová, 2018; Prostináková Hossová & Rusňáková, 2022). With the intention to find out to what extent the film narratives analysed by us refer to the real-life stories of the selected persons and thus fulfil their informative-educational character (informing the audience about the lives of the selected artists and at the same time educating them about music production and the functioning of the music industry), we employ the relevant research procedures. Emphasis is placed on narrative analysis as a qualitative research method, which we perceive as crucial for the fulfilment of the aims of the present scientific study.

2 Methodology

Narrative analysis examines the sequence of real or fictional events, the various strategies, codes and conventions that make up the resulting narrative. This, however, exists in several forms. It can be a novel, a film, a play, a mythology, a painting, a musical work, a podcast, and so on. In view of the thematic focus of the study and its main objective, which is to elucidate the conventional genre patterns and iconography of the film genre of biographical drama, the subject of the analysis becomes the film and its story. Narrative analysis can thus be more specifically defined as a subset of qualitative content analysis aimed at examining selected narrative properties and features of audiovisual content, in our case a film work.

In media practice we encounter several specific approaches to narrative analysis of audiovisual content. For example, when evaluating film narrative, researchers often reflect on what codes and conventions make up film language, or what elements constitute it. They then identify and explain these elements in the film and convert them into measurable quantities, signs, and variables. This means that they create certain analytical categories out of them. In the narrative analysis of mediated content, it is possible to describe a few symptomatic elements that carry meaning in a certain context and thus contribute to the overall narrative. In this study, we focus exclusively on the following set of framing narrative elements (analytic categories):

The common denominator of the selected research materials (films) is their **genre classification**. Genre is generally understood as a set of formal and content characteristics of a particular work that refer to an established, recurring type or category of media products characterised by common features (thematic, compositional or formal). However, it is important to realise that the popularity of different genres increases or decreases in line with the evolution of the cultural, social and economic situation. Therefore, the relatively stable presence of the film genre called *biographical drama* or *biopic* in film production, lasting several decades, and the audience popularity achieved determines the choice of our research materials. At this point, we are interested in how the different genre elements together create a formula, the form of which both the producers and the recipients of the presented work are aware. Indeed, it is known that, thanks to this knowledge, media audiences quickly and easily recognise the belonging of media content to a particular genre group (for more information, see Radošinská et al., 2024), including images belonging to the category of biographical dramas.

An essential part of genre iconography is determining the **theme and subject matter** of a film, with some themes being more general and commonly present across multiple genres, while others are specific to particular genres. In general, however, the theme describes the basic thematic-narrative section of the work, in our case framed by a three-act narrative model, while the subject matter is the initial idea of the work; it represents the section of reality that is transformed into the final audiovisual form. The depiction of music industry personalities in the selected biopics presupposes the application of an identical theme. In particular, we are talking about the depiction of the unique life stories or professional achievements or failures of famous people, or the reflection on a certain section of the lives of popular music industry personalities. The theme and the subject matter then jointly refer to the **main idea** of the film, elaborated by the creative and production team in terms of ideological content. The main idea is a kind of punchline, the central message of the story presented to the recipient. Its presence in the work foreshadows the existence of the **main plot**, the primary collision of the story on which the central plot is built. The latter is usually based on belonging to a particular film genre. Last but not least, we emphasise that in every feature film there are

clearly distinguishable protagonists, characters – by analysing them we reveal the interrelationships that tend to be the source of most conflicts, including the main plot.

Each research is preceded by a definition of the main objective, the research methods and analytical categories used, as well as a justification of the choice of research materials. In our case, the choice of research materials – biopics about prominent figures in the music industry – is deliberate. In the following case study, we present a few focal films with the intention of assessing their supporting ideas and other framing narrative aspects represented by each analytical category. The identical genre classification of the audiovisual images constitutes an essential aspect in the selection of research materials. The selected works portray the life stories of specific musical personalities who have left a legacy in musical history through their work. We reflect on questions of their identity, relationships, power and position in society. We examine how these films apply different genre formulas to record and interpret as faithfully as possible the life stories of the characters presented, while respecting the respective genre iconography. In the research materials, for the given reason, we identify the essential intertextual connections between the real and the mediated reality, which enables us to assess the fidelity of the film work in relation to the depicted reality. In fact, the critical evaluation of biopics presenting the fates of selected music industry personalities opens a discussion on whether the analysed materials have an informative-educational character at all and to what extent they refer to the real lives of the subjects of denunciation. In this context, we clarify the relation of the texts (films) to objective reality. An equally important reason for the choice of the research materials is their achieved popularity in comparison with other films of this genre group produced in the relevant calendar year. Specifically, we focus on twenty-eight important feature-length biopics of the 21st century that are the subject of debate by both the professional and lay public and/or that have won several prestigious film awards.

To clarify the conventional genre patterns and iconography of the biopic genre in the form of critical reflection on selected films (research materials), the formulation of relevant research questions is essential. Answering them is the logical outcome of any qualitative research, hence narrative analysis:

RQ1: What common and distinct narrative aspects (analytical categories) characterise the research materials? Do the research materials conform to the genre iconography and conventional genre patterns characteristic of the biopic genre?

RQ2: Are the research materials informative and educational, and thus reflect real aspects of the lives of the people being depicted? Do the research materials change the meaning of the presented facts because of the dramatization of the plot? If so, in what way and to what extent?

3 An Overview of Major Biographical Film Dramas, Their Supporting Ideas and Basic Narrative Aspects (Case Study)

To begin this part of the study, we mention the American hip-hop artist Eminem, who made his film debut in *8 Mile* (Hanson, 2001). In it, he is introduced as the protagonist, Jimmy “Rabbit” Smith Jr, a white working-class rapper from a white working-class background. *8 Mile* refers to the socio-cultural, class, economic alienation and high unemployment rate left behind by the ruling political elite in the late 1980s. The protagonist sees a way out of this bleak situation in a career as a rapper. He sees hip-hop and rap as the only means of expressing his true feelings and as a way to break out of a toxic environment full of prejudice, economic problems, class and racial inequality. The rundown part of Detroit, to which the title of the film refers, becomes a refuge for Jimmy and his crew. The title song, *Lose Yourself*, reflects this idea – It became the inspiration for the production of the feature film in question, loosely based on the life of the most popular and successful white rapper of the 21st century, with an emphasis on capturing

his harrowing (psychological and career) journey to well-deserved success in a field that had previously been the “privilege” of rappers of exclusively African-American descent. The aforementioned *Lose Yourself* even won the *Academy Awards* for Best Original Song for a Motion Picture in 2003.

Ray Charles, the legendary American musician, singer and pianist, is famous for his innovative fusion of different musical genres and styles, his unmistakable voice and his distinctive, controversial personality. The life story of this artist – highlighting his professional career and personal life – is retold in the biopic *Ray* (Hackford, 2004), but compared to the previous film *8 Mile*, the main character is not represented by a portrayed actor. Ray Charles is portrayed by the American actor Jamie Foxx, who has won several prestigious awards (Academy Awards, Golden Globe and BAFTA in 2005 for Best Actor in a Leading Role, among many others) for the way he has “translated” the unique, complicated character of one of the most significant musical figures of all time into the form of a film character. A sad childhood linked to the tragic death of his younger brother, serious psychological problems (depression, affective states), health problems (loss of eyesight) and drug and narcotic addiction – all these factors went towards building his strong bond with music. The dramatic structure of the narrative is enhanced by the musical component of the work. Among other things, it points to the importance of the legacy of artist Ray Charles towards changing the perception of the previously segregated culture of the USA in the 1960s. Thoughtful sound design work predestined the title *Ray* to win the prestigious Academy Awards and BAFTA for Best Sound in a Motion Picture in 2005, and the version of *Georgia on my Mind* became the official anthem of the US state of Georgia – the original home of the song’s author, Ray Charles himself.

Last Days (Van Stant, 2005) presents moments from the life of the talented musician Blake (Michael Pitt) to highlight the inner feelings and psychological state of the presented person in the last hours of his life. The young and talented protagonist’s journey to fame is replaced by a tragic view of a lost human existence. Blake does not cope with the heaviness associated with fame and success. Depressive states, loneliness, the destruction of his own personality and the “decay of the mind” cause Blake to seek redemption and detachment from life. Due to the main idea, which in a controversial and often misunderstood way depicts “a dead soul in a still living body”, the film cannot be considered as a classic biopic, but rather as a kind of insight into the soul of the main character, a psychological musical drama. The way the story is handled, the actions of the main character and the portrayal of related circumstances and scenes are strongly reminiscent of the life, career and death of Kurt Cobain, the frontman of the popular nineties rock band Nirvana. Although *Last Days* does not directly refer to this music legend, even though the implied musical compositions (e.g., the title song of *Last Days* was composed by Michael Pitt himself and not by Kurt Cobain), the attempt to create a kind of symbolic link between the protagonist and the figure of Kurt Cobain is significant. The musical component does not fall behind the other components of the work either, and even exceeds it, as evidenced by the Vulcain artistic and technical award for image and sound work at the Cannes Film Festival in 2005.

An interesting feature of the biopic *Walk the Line* (Mangold, 2005) is that, compared to previous titles, it is an adaptation of a literary model, the 1975 autobiography *Johnny Cash – Man in Black*, which becomes the subject for the treatment of the story of America’s most famous country singer, guitarist, songwriter and actor of the 1960s, with a distinctively deep voice and a specific, original musical expression. The film’s treatment of the life and work of Johnny Cash (Joaquin Phoenix) highlights the cultural impact of his musical output, as well as the process of the protagonist’s psychological transformation. The dark side of his life associated with his rapidly acquired fame (destructive tendencies, conflicting behaviour, a stint in prison, a bad relationship with his father, contact with drugs and alcohol) is contrasted with his iconic position as the so-called man in black. A large part of the film is accompanied by songs “written” by Johnny Cash himself, which are presented by the protagonist of the story and, together with the other narrative components of the work (characters, space, time, plot, etc.), form one compact whole, which was awarded in 2006 with the prestigious Academy Awards, BAFTAs and a number of other awards (Reese Witherspoon as Best Actress in a Leading Role and the award for Best Sound in a Motion Picture).

The first and only feature film to date with three Oscar nominations in the “song of the year” category (winning the 2007 Academy Awards for music, best sound mixing; winning Best Song for a Motion Picture at the Grammys with *Love You I Do*; and many other converted nominations) is the biographical musical drama *Dreamgirls* (Condon, 2006). It is a film adaptation of the 1981 Broadway musical of the same name, ostensibly based on the story of the

three-member African American musical group The Supremes (active from 1959 to 1977), with Diana Ross as the lead singer. *Dreamgirls* is a film depicting typical human traits (envy, hypocrisy, arrogance, greed) that become an obstacle to building a true friendship. The “glory tax” is paid by the singers of a group called *Dreams* – Effie, Lorrell and Deena (Jennifer Hudson, Beyoncé Knowles, Anika Noni Rose) – when they transform from what was originally a vocal trio into a hugely popular girl group in the 1960s under the guidance of ambitious manager Curtis Taylor (Jamie Foxx). However, their quest for the limelight distorts their original values of friendship, honesty and tolerance.

The main idea of *I’m Not There* (Haynes, 2007) is to draw attention to the fact that the media’s portrayal of a well-known personality may not always be true. The memory of the American musician Bob Dylan, mediated in the form of the film *I’m Not There*, does not attempt to reveal the truth, but its intention is to dramatize six different versions of Dylan through the representation of his person by several actors (Christian Bale, Cate Blanchett, Richard Gere, Heath Ledger and others) at all stages of his life. The intention of such character work is to highlight the ever-changing nature of Bob Dylan (the musical focus of his work, the psychological, character and physical traits of his personality), who is also nicknamed “the man of many faces”. The biopic in question, “about Dylan without Dylan”, disrupts the classical dramaturgical structure of the narrative by interfering with the linearity or continuity of the narrative, which metaphorically refers to the very process of constructing a media image of (any) celebrity. It is the same with the use of the author’s songs in the film – the spoken word of one of the main characters is automatically translated into the lyrics of a particular Dylan song or, on the contrary, this rule is broken and after the statement suggesting the song, some other song originating from the repertoire of the musician in question is played. The message of *I’m Not There* is clear – the recipient cannot simply rely on what they see or hear in the media, but they are encouraged to seek the truth.

La Vie en Rose (Dahan, 2007) is a biopic about the French chansonnier Edith Piaf (Marion Cotillard), which “transformed” several nominations for film community awards in 2008 for the quality of its production design (e.g., Best Actress in a Leading Role, Best Sound, Best Music, etc.). The film features the real and authentic voice of this world-famous singer, including her notorious chanson songs. As in the previous case, there is a constant interweaving of timelines and the placement of several ellipses, or time slips, in the plot, which, however, together refer to the story of the protagonist, marked by tragic circumstances, living in inhospitable conditions, longing for love and finding life’s meaning in music. The transformation from a poor girl to a globally admired celebrity becomes the main theme of the work presented here.

The biopic *Notorious B.I.G.* (Tillman Jr., 2009) tells the story of one of the greatest legends in rap history, Christopher Wallace, known as Notorious B.I.G. His path to success (at a time when rap and hip-hop were coming into the public consciousness) and subsequent tragic fate (violent death in 1997) are highlighted. The persona of the rapper is mediated to the viewer through the actor Jamal Woolard, and the central storyline (contact with drugs, unexpected fatherhood, rapid rise to fame, depiction of the iconic West Coast vs. East Coast struggle, the tragic death of the main character) is dramatized by authentic music derived from the rapper’s own work – this is used in various scenes of the film and completes the work in terms of meaning. The placement of authentic footage in the final sequence of the film further highlights the personality of the musician nicknamed Notorious B.I.G. and his position as an African American cultural phenomenon, which he still holds today.

The Runaways (Sigismondi, 2010) tells the story of the first all-girl rock band of the second half of the 1970s with the eponymous name *The Runaways*, based on a 1989 literary work – the life writings of one of the members of the band, Cherie Currie, entitled *Neon Angel: The Cherie Currie Story*. The unexpected fame of the two young singers Cherie Currie (Dakota Fanning) and Joan Jett (Kristen Stewart) was one of the causes of their later estrangement, but it also contributed to the drug addictions and multiple psychological problems of the two main characters, which naturally led to the break-up of *The Runaways*. In the sung scenes, the voices of the actresses who sang several songs from the soundtrack of the film in question (e.g., *Cherry Bomb*, *Dead and Justice*, and others) are retained alongside the authentic musical sequences.

Another biopic based on a book, namely Jim Drury’s 2005 publication *Ian Dury and the Blockheads*, is *Sex & Drugs & Rock & Roll* (Whitecross, 2010). As the title of the literary novel and its film adaptation suggests, it is a depiction of the life story of Ian Dury, the founder of the punk-rock scene in the UK in the 1970s, who suffered

cerebral palsy at a young age and subsequently struggled with his “demons” (confrontation with drugs and alcohol), but despite these facts, managed to overcome himself and “demolish” other people’s prejudices. As this is a biographical musical drama, the presence of (authentic) music plays an irreplaceable role here too.

Valentino Liberace (Michael Douglas), a talented pianist of the 1970s with an admirable repertoire, perfectionist, extrovert, entertainer and exhibitionist all rolled into one, becomes the central character of the biopic *Liberace!* (Soderbergh, 2013). The main idea of the story is the depiction of his complicated homosexual love affair with the much younger and characteristically different Scott Thorston (Matt Damon), which escapes into numerous dramatic situations (concealing his homosexual orientation due to the controversial view of the issue of the time, loss of identity, insight into a world full of drugs, venereal disease and alcohol, building a false media image through various plastic surgeries and body modifications, trying to build a romantic ideal for female fans despite his beliefs). The dramatic break-up became the motivation for Valentino Liberace to write *Liberace: An Autobiography* in 1973. The latter later became the subject for its film adaptation. Despite the fact that *Liberace!* depicts the life and career of the world-famous pianist Valentino Liberace, the film is dedicated to another musician, namely the composer Marvin Hamlisch, who composed the music for the biography in question.

The socio-cultural conditions resonating in the first half of the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the presentation of the life and career of the so-called The Godfather of Soul or Mr. Dynamite, the legendary soul musician James Brown (Chadwick Boseman), are aptly represented in *Get on Up* (Taylor, 2014). The chosen dramaturgical structure reflects the entire life of this musician with the placement of numerous time lapses, flashbacks or glimpses into the future. The narrative depicts his early childhood in the 1930s, during which he lived in poor circumstances and without parents, his troubled and controversial life journey (staying in reformatories and in prison, accusations of drug possession and of abusing women, egocentric behaviour, etc.), and leads up to his career peak – gaining the status of one of the most influential and played musicians of all time. The repertoire of James Brown, whose work was profoundly influenced by the events he lived through, is presented in *Get on Up* through the thoughtful handling of sound and music – these, together with the other narrative elements, make the work a complex whole. In addition, the composer’s music is complemented by compositions by composer Thomas Newman.

A realistic take on the story of hip-hop music group N.W.A., *Straight Outta Compton* (Gray, 2015) features minimal interference with actual events – It gives an account of a group of young people (Eazy-E, Ice Cube and Dr. Dre) living in the mid-1980s in Compton, California, a city notorious for its high crime rate, numerous drug cartels and police brutality. The rappers, “scarred” by life, escape from this toxic environment, attempting to make it in the world of the music. They see a way out of their bleak situation in the production of rap songs full of hate and vulgar words aimed at fighting against the powers that be and racial hatred. This way of working with music and lyrics has translated into the creation of a new musical genre called gangsta rap. At the same time, the success of the film has revived interest in the songs from N.W.A., one of the most controversial musical groups in history (the film is named after this 1988 debut album, *Straight Outta Compton*).

I Saw the Light (Abraham, 2015) is a glimpse into the career of iconic musician, country music pioneer and songwriter Hank Williams (Tom Hiddleston), who rose to fame in the post-World War II era, but the film focuses much more intensely on introspection into the soul of the protagonist, exploring his conflicted character and his troubled relationship with women and alcohol. The conversational nature of the narrative and the sheer focus of the story on the main character’s psyche suppresses the musical component of the work, which is less present in the title of *I Saw the Light* – despite the fact that it is a biographical musical drama and Hank Williams’ work is now considered an American classic. The film is based on the 1955 literary work by Colin Escott, George Merritt and William MacEwen and is entitled *Hank Williams: The Biography*. Its underlying idea, as with the film adaptation under consideration, is to reflect on the rise (rapid fame) and fall (premature death due to ill health) of one of the greatest country singers of the last century.

Florence Foster Jenkins (Frears, 2016) is a film that captivates not only with its cast (Meryl Streep, Hugh Grant), but above all with its subject matter inspired by the true story of the worst singer of all time – Florence Foster Jenkins, who worked in New York in the first half of the 1940s. Actress Meryl Streep was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role for her performance, mainly due to her authentic ability to mimic the speech

of the aforementioned “opera singer”. However, the songs heard during the closing credits are the actual voice recordings of Florence Foster Jenkins herself. The addition of a comedy component (the untalented opera music lover and her efforts to make it in the field) to the dramatic storyline of the work (the main character’s serious illness, her alternative relationship with her husband, etc.) makes the story of this untalented singer an extraordinary biographical musical comedy drama.

The biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody* (Singer & Fletcher, 2018) is the most commercially successful biopic ever made. The film’s unprecedented success is largely based on the ways in which the filmmakers use the popular British band Queen’s best-loved songs to move the main storyline forward and to enrich it with a deeper “emotional plane”. The story of the frontman of the musical group – Freddie Mercury – is introduced by Rami Malek, who performs the artist’s songs in an authentic way, thus creating numerous associations with the personality of Freddie Mercury. *Bohemian Rhapsody* celebrates Queen, the music and especially Freddie Mercury. He has defied stereotypes with his work and life, which makes him a controversial but hugely important and influential artist. The film depicts the rise of the band through their revolutionary sound and iconic songs, with the musical component of the work developing the narrative. The story depicts the band’s rise to worldwide popularity, continues with many plot twists (conflicts between band members, disturbed values of friendship, addiction to psychotropic substances and narcotics, promiscuity, the search for their own identity, the discovery of the main character’s fatal HIV disease), and culminates in the iconic performance at *Live Aid* in 1985. Based on the quality, economic success and popularity with the viewing public, *Bohemian Rhapsody* has won several prestigious awards (e.g., Best Actor in a Leading Role, Best Film Editing, Best Sound Mixing at the Academy Awards).

Also worth mentioning is *Judy* (Goold, 2019) – a serious story of a brilliant singer and successful actress who loved her children more than anything, but lived her whole life under incredible pressure, which took a toll on her (mental) health. The talent of Judy Garland (Renée Zellweger) became the subject of a biographical drama about the most famous actress of Hollywood’s golden era. Judy is proof that even celebrities are just people with their dark sides (alcohol and drug addiction, loneliness, failing marriages, depression), but the spotlight makes their problems much more visible. The desire to return to an “ordinary life”, despite the success achieved, becomes the underlying idea of the film in question. It is important to mention the soundtrack to the film of the same name, *Judy*, which received a Grammy nomination for Best Traditional Pop Recording in 2021. Garland’s songs were sung by the actress Renée Zellweger herself and later joined by a number of other well-known musical personalities (Sam Smith, Rufus Wainwright and others). In addition to the above, we also highlight the prestigious film events of the Academy Awards, BAFTA or Independent Spirit Awards, where Renée Zellweger won the Best Actress in a Leading Role award in 2020.

Rocketman (Fletcher, 2019) is an obvious presentation of one of the most famous and successful musicians of our time – Elton John – and stylistically “mixes” the themes of his songs with the narrative itself, constructed from the main motifs or turning points of his life. The result of such stylised work is the creation of a biographical musical drama and a musical (numerous musical interludes and a mix of Elton John’s most popular songs), which work together as a whole. For example, the title *Rocketman* itself refers to one of the musician’s songs. The main idea of this film portrait is a reflection on Elton John’s extravagant personality in connection with insights into the themes of homosexuality, loneliness, drug and alcohol addiction, parental distrust and the difficult task of star status. Intertextually linked to the aforementioned *Liberal* is present in the scene in which Elton (Taron Egerton, winner of the Golden Globe in 2020 for Best Actor in a Comedy or Musical) calls his mother to tell her that he is homosexual, while a film reflecting on the issue is on the television. Last but not least, the *Academy Awards* event at which Elton John, together with Bernie Taupin, won the Oscar for Best Original Song for a Motion Picture (*I’m Gonna Love Me Again*) in 2020.

The success of the aforementioned film was followed by the feature-length title *The Dirt* (Tremaine, 2019), based on the best-selling 2001 autobiography of the members of *Mötley Crüe*. Given the commercial success of the book, it was expected that the film would be well-received by the band’s fans, which eventually came to fruition. The main storyline follows the rise of the notorious Los Angeles-based rock band. Founding members Nikki Sixx (Douglas Booth), Mick Mars (Iwan Rheon), Tommy Lee (Colson Baker) and Vince Neil (Daniel Webber) come from different backgrounds, but all live the “sex, drugs and rock’n’roll” lifestyle to the fullest. The script deals with the most important and traumatic events associated with such a lifestyle, depicting acts of domestic violence, child neglect,

unintentional vehicular manslaughter and drug overdoses. Throughout the film, the main characters take turns commenting on the scenes depicted through voice-over, which brings a sense of closeness between the musicians and the audience, and partially links the film genre of biographical drama with documentary.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom (Wolfe, 2020), a Netflix-produced biopic, is based on the 1982 play of the same name. While recording an album in a white-owned studio, a group of African American musicians are confronted with issues of race and power. Set in the 1920s, the film's main storyline centres on influential blues singer Gertrude "Ma" Rainey (Viola Davis) and talented trumpeter Levee (Chadwick Boseman), who are driven by a dream to lead a band, which results in a dispute over a new arrangement of a song called *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. Due to its limited theatrical release, the film received five Golden Globes nominations, despite being produced by Netflix, at the time primarily focused on online streaming.

The English singer-songwriter David Bowie is the main character in the 2020 film *Stardust* (Range), which is also worth mentioning in the case study as a model example of a successful biographical drama of this kind. The largely fictional story is set in 1971 during the singer's tour of the United States, and perhaps the most striking aspect of the title is that it does not use any of David Bowie's original songs in its content, due to the refusal of consent from the surviving family members. The story specifically focuses on the character of the notoriously eccentric singer Johnny Flynn. He presents songs during concerts that are covers performed by Bowie during his lifetime.

Another musical biographical drama based on a book is *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* (Daniels, 2021). Andra Day portrays the talented singer Billie Holiday, who rose to fame primarily for her song *Strange Fruit*, a reference to the controversial subject of lynching. The film in question truthfully depicts the story of how the singer was advised not to play the song at her concerts, despite being asked to do so by her fans during her performances. Racism and the importance of human rights are thus seen as the central theme of the film in question. At the same time, the viewer discovers the real life of the protagonist struggling with drug addiction, with Billie Holiday being a target of anti-drug organisations. In general, *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* depicts issues of societal significance through a reflection on the life of a talented singer.

Racism and poor social conditions are also prominent themes in another musical biopic about a woman, the artist Aretha Franklin (Jennifer Hudson). Opening with *Respect* (Tommy, 2021), the film illustrates the first two decades of Aretha Franklin's life, highlighting the consequences of losing her mother at a young age, as well as the fact that she herself became a young single mother. Later, the film in question describes her road to fame and career success, despite her unhappy personal life (an abusive marriage). The notorious song *Respect* became the artist's personal anthem and a musical manifesto of liberation in the fight against racism and sexism.

Elvis (Luhmann, 2022) is a biographical drama that explores the dark sides and turning points in the life of American rock and roll singer and actor Elvis Presley (Austin Butler). The film focuses primarily on the depiction of interpersonal relationships, in particular the complicated relationship with his long-time and calculating manager Tom Parker (Tom Hanks), giving the viewer a sense of another main character in the piece, the exhausting contact with his fans, conditioned by the artist's global popularity, and the romance with one of the most important and influential people in Elvis's life, Priscilla Presley (Olivia DeJonge). The film traces Presley's rise to fame to his unprecedented success, focusing on the evolving socio-cultural situation in mid-20th century America. The popularity achieved and the positive reviews from the professional and general public (multiple nominations for prestigious film awards, praise for Butler's performance, direction, costume design and musical sequences) made this one of the top ten films of 2022. The musical aspect of the work is an authentic rendition of Presley's most popular songs by actor Austin Butler.

I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Lemmons, 2022), a film musical drama about the life and career of American pop icon Whitney Houston (Naomi Ackie), received critical reviews from the professional community, but was nevertheless an extraordinary commercial success. The film tells the story of how an "ordinary" singer in a church becomes one of the most popular music personalities ever. Famous moments in Whitney Houston's career, including her performance at a Super Bowl sporting event (headlining the Half Time Show) and landing a pivotal role in the 1992 film *The Bodyguard*, are complemented in *I Wanna Dance with Somebody* by a reflection on her ups and downs, including depictions of her complicated relationship with Bobby Brown (Ashton Sanders), drug problems, and

financial troubles. Whitney Houston's tragic death in 2012 (due to an overdose of psychotropic and narcotic drugs) concludes the audiovisual narrative presented here. The importance of the musical aspect of the work is underlined by the presence of numerous remixes and original versions of the artist's songs. The analysed research material has also been nominated for several awards at the prestigious *BAFA Awards* and *BET Awards* (visual effects, musical editing and direction).

American biographical romantic drama film *Maestro* (Cooper, 2023) describes the relationship between American composer Leonard Bernstein (Bradley Cooper) and his wife Felicia Montealegre (Carey Mulligan). The film was named one of the ten best films of 2023, and also received seven Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture, Best Actor and Actress in a Leading Role, as well as several nominations at the BAFTA Awards, Golden Globe Awards and Screen Actors Guild Awards. The story follows the life of composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein from his youth to his later years. In particular, it focuses on the dramatic situations associated with the relationships of this character-specific personality (Leonard Bernstein) with other men, at the forefront of which is a supportive, strong woman (Felicia Montealegre). Authentic tones from the composer's "workshop" are occasionally heard in the work, but with no apparent reference to his original music. The latter stands in the background, while the dramatic plot, based on a love story between two people, takes centre stage.

The life of English jazz singer and songwriter Amy Winehouse (Marisa Abela) is depicted in *Back to Black* (Taylor-Johnson, 2024) primarily through her relationship with her grandmother Cynthia (Leslie Manville) and boyfriend, and later husband, Blake (Jack O'Connell). The musician's breakthrough album *Back to Black*, released in 2006 and still considered one of the best musical achievements of the 21st century, is a direct reference to her difficult time of losing loved ones (her grandmother's death and her breakup with her partner). Struggling with addictions, mental health issues, toxic relationships and worldwide attention made this young woman with exceptional singing talent a tragically deceased legend of the jazz music genre. Despite contradictory reviews from critics and the public, the film was quite a significant economic success.

To conclude this case study, we present the most recent film worthy of mention and subsequent qualitative analysis – *Bob Dylan: A Complete Unknown* (Mangold, 2024). Only nineteen years old, the American musician and songwriter Bob Dylan (Timothée Chalamet) comes to the attention of the general public in the early 1960s and becomes a worldwide sensation. With reference to the book's topic, the film in question portrays Dylan from his earliest successes in the music industry, specifically in folk music, to his most famous rock and roll performance with an electric guitar in 1965 in the American city of Newport. The narrative is supplemented by a romantic subplot, managerial and friendship conflicts, Dylan's crisis in his professional career, his experimentation with rock instruments in the folk music scene, and the negative crowd reaction to the musician's early performances with the "new sound". Director Mangold, whom we have already mentioned as the creator of *Walk the Line* (2005), about musician Johnny Cash, once again used the presence of that character as Dylan's supporter in his rebellious intention to defy everyone to change the music. The title of the film *A Complete Unknown* also intertextually refers to the refrain of Dylan's song *Like a Rolling Stone*. Together with other popular supporting actors (e.g., Edward Norton, Monica Barbaro), the protagonist Timothée Chalamet and the creators of the work in question are credited with earning three nominations at the Golden Globe and Critics Choice Awards in the categories of Best Film and Best Supporting Actress (Elle Fanning).

Reflection on the music industry in film production through qualitative (narrative) content analysis of selected research materials presented an interesting and stimulating area of research. This is because the genre of biographical (music) drama is perceived as an ideal vehicle for depicting musical personalities, their lives and works directly on film. The assumption that these audiovisual works can be not only financially successful but also qualitatively significant also opens up an important debate about the ways in which the music industry is represented in cinema and how the meaning of the facts described is altered by dramatizing the narrative structure of the work. An important aspect of the study is therefore to assess the extent to which these films provide factual information and educate media audiences. With the intention of shedding light on this issue, we summarise the theoretical-empirical data collected in the following section. For these purposes, we answer the research questions set out by the methodology.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion on the music industry and its critical reflection in the film genre called *biographical drama* inevitably leads to the conclusion that biographical films (biopics) depicting musicians are among the most important media contents that represent the synergy of cinema and music. Notwithstanding the aforementioned (often negative) critical reception of this film genre, biopics about musicians have a real potential to become not only financially successful but also qualitatively significant creative achievements. Building on the theoretical and empirical data gathered, this section of the study provides answers to the research questions, beginning with a comprehensive assessment of the issues surrounding new trends in the production of biopics with respect to genre iconography and conventional genre patterns associated with this type of film. We also point out the possible informative-educational nature of the chosen research materials, whose factuality may, we suggest, be influenced by several narrative aspects and dramatizing factors:

RQ1: What common and distinct narrative aspects (analytical categories) characterise the research materials? Do the research materials conform to the genre iconography and conventional genre patterns characteristic of the biopic genre?

Through a qualitative narrative analysis of biopics about famous music personalities, we have demonstrated the presence of the defined analytical categories in the selected research materials. We focused more closely on the identification of basic iconographic elements and conventional genre patterns associated with the narrative structure of the audiovisual works in question. In particular, we considered the identification and justification of the genre classification, theme, topic, main idea and the following main plot as an essential part of the genre iconography, with the main and secondary characters of the story as its representatives.

The analysed films are biographical dramas focusing on the reflection of the personal lives and professional careers of real music personalities of the past or present (e.g., *Ray*, 2004 – Ray Charles; *Walk the Line*, 2005 – Johnny Cash; *La Vie en Rose*, 2007 – Edith Piaf; *Back to Black*, 2024 – Amy Winehouse and many others). Thus, the selected films are in all cases based on the unique life stories, fates and professional endeavours of popular personalities in the music industry. Their creators offer viewers insights into the lives of several music icons – from rappers (N.W.A, Eminem), pianists and composers (Valentino Liberace, Ray Charles, Leonard Bernstein), jazz and blues singers (Billie Holiday, Judy Garland, Ma Rainey, Amy Winehouse), pop-rock legends (Elvis Presley, Freddie Mercury, Ian Dury, Bob Dylan, Mötley Crüe, Elton John, Whitney Houston), to the personalities of French chanson, soul and country music (Edith Piaf, Johnny Cash, Aretha Franklin, Hank Williams) or the scandalous names of the music industry (Florence Foster Jenkins). In terms of their thematic treatment, the films examined cover a wide range of stories about the above-mentioned musicians, with each of them providing a unique insight into their lives – both private and professional (e.g., *Dreamgirls*, 2006 – appealing to the issue of toxic relationships in the music industry; *I'm Not There*, 2007 – suggesting the fluidity of a musician's identity through a multi-layered depiction of their persona at different times and perspectives in their lives; *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, 2020 – reflecting on racial and social issues of the past century; *The United States vs. Billie Holiday*, 2021 – assessing issues of racism and police brutality in the 20th century; and many other examples).

The main idea of the described films can be comprehensively defined as a presentation of the ups and downs of musical personalities in connection with the moral, cultural and social contexts (conditions) that influenced their lives and careers. In particular, their unhealthy interpersonal relationships (e.g., *Dreamgirls*, 2006; *The Runaways*, 2010; *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2018; *Elvis*, 2022; *Maestro*, 2023; *Bob Dylan: A Complete Unknown*, 2024), addictions (e.g., *Ray*, 2004; *Walk the Line*, 2005; *Last Days*, 2005; *La Vie en Rose*, 2007; *I Wanna Dance with Somebody*, 2022; *Back to Black*, 2024), identity crises (e.g., *I'm Not There*, 2007; *Liberace!*, 2013), or socioeconomic, socio-cultural, and existential issues (*8 Mile*, 2001; *Notorious B.I.G.*, 2009; *Straight Outta Compton*, 2015; *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, 2020). Although moral, social, cultural, interpersonal or intrapersonal conflicts are represented differently in the examined works and often intertwined within a single work, in all cases these sub-issues together generate the main plot of a film. This is the main hero's or heroine's attempt to cope with their problems of whatever

nature and to extricate themselves from the unfavourable situations in which these characters have found themselves during their lives. The unique perspective of the research materials on the themes and related conflicts provides room for creative portrayals of the main and secondary plot referents. We note that in all cases, the central character of the respective work becomes an iconic musical figure with a significant pop culture legacy.

The protagonists participate together in the creation of the narrative structure of the research materials. In all cases, this follows a three-act narrative model – Act I, Plot Point I, Act II, Plot Point II and Act III. The three-act narrative model in our case represents the overcoming of a series of obstacles by the hero or heroine, whose common purpose is to achieve a set goal. The above essentially refers to the main idea of the images – the depiction of the ups and downs of the central characters, representatives of the music business. In the given context, it is also important to mention the fact that a large part of the analysed films starts *in medias res*. This means that the work does not depict the life of the subject from birth (e.g., *Walk the Line*, 2005; *Get on Up*, 2014), but focuses only on a slice of their life (e.g., *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2018; *Rocketman*, 2019). The difference is also noticeable in the way the narrative structure of the films is constructed. While some titles use frequent flashbacks (e.g., *Get on Up*, 2014; *Maestro*, 2023), other films depict the life story of musicians in a linear manner (e.g., *Walk the Line*, 2005; *Straight Outta Compton*, 2015; *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2018; *Bob Dylan: A Complete Unknown*, 2024). At the same time, the final section of most of our research materials is enriched with reminiscent authentic footage and additional factual information possessing a certain cathartic effect.

In attempting to answer the question of whether the research materials conform to the genre iconography and conventional genre patterns characteristic of the biopic, we find that all the films examined present complex narratives about the individual or collective success, fame, professional and personal lives of selected musical personalities represented by actors/actresses who act as the main plot referents. For this reason, the research materials can reasonably be regarded as biographical dramas inspired by real events. We have also confirmed that these biopics are mostly realistic, partly fictional in nature, but some of them refer to a real musical personality through an unrealistic, fictional character.

The analysed films are also manifested by the conventionality of their dramaturgical structure. It is true that the main protagonists face complications, personal tragedies, and must overcome many obstacles in order to succeed or achieve their goals. Special attention is focused on the depiction of their ups and downs, which is the main idea of the research materials and equally the main idea of biographical dramas in general. There is also a respect for the three-act narrative model, the difference being noticeable only in the linearity of the narrative (chronological vs. retrospective treatment of the plot) and in the possibilities of its depiction (depiction of the main character's life as a whole vs. depiction of a slice of the main character's life). We will also mention the tensions between individuals and moral, cultural, or social norms, which together shape the central conflict of the research materials. Specifically, we are talking about the depiction of crisis situations in the life of the person being pilloried, which are intertwined with the celebration of their career achievements. This approach to story treatment offers elaborate storylines and deeper depictions of the personalities of the main characters (artists). In many ways, however, the psychological-dramatic aspect of biographical dramas surpasses their musical aspect.

To conclude this part of the study, we emphasise that the films we have analysed are one-off titles – they are unique works that are not characterised by significant work with seriality (e.g., in the form of the production of multiple sequels to an original work). Although the stories of famous musical personalities from the past have been the subject of many adaptations, this way of working with the subject (real-life musicians) does not, for the most part, directly develop the original story in terms of applying specific principles of seriality. The plot is usually told differently in biopics, with a different creative and acting team and dramaturgical structure. The above is confirmed by the films we have analysed, especially *I'm Not There* (2007) and *Bob Dylan: A Complete Unknown* (2024) – which are typical examples of different treatments of the life and career of the musician Bob Dylan. In essence, these are so-called reboots – a new film drawing on the same subject matter (the real life of the musician), while the title is in no way a remake of or a direct sequel to an earlier work.

RQ2: Are the research materials informative and educational, and thus reflect real aspects of the lives of the people being depicted? Does the research material change the meaning of the presented facts because of the dramatization of the plot? If so, in what way and to what extent?

The selected audiovisual works depict the life stories of specific musical personalities who have left their mark on musical history. Through qualitative analysis, we found that these films refer to iconography and conventional genre patterns of biographical drama. However, significant differences are evident in the fidelity of the portrayal of the main characters' life stories. By identifying intertextual connections between real and mediated reality, we revealed that all the research materials refer in some way to the life of a musical figure of the past or present, but the fidelity of the film in relation to the reality depicted differs in some cases. The aforementioned determines the view of the analysed titles as materials with informative-educational character. In general, informative-educational content not only informs but also educates the recipient. In the sphere of cinema, such an attribute is used mainly for documentaries, which are often confused in common practice with biographical drama. However, the difference between the two film genres is that the documentary focuses on the authenticity and objectivity of the facts portrayed, using real footage and/or statements by competent persons, while the biographical drama combines fact with fiction to create an emotionally powerful, stylised and dramatic fictionalised narrative. This way of constructing the work consequently determines how the audience perceives and interprets the information and stories presented. This means that the classification of media content into one or another genre group influences the way media audiences view a particular work as a particular type of informational and educational material. Of all the films examined, it is the feature-length title *The Dirt* (2019) that is dominated by documentary elements – the main characters and competent persons take turns in commenting on the scenes depicted through voice-over, thus partially linking the film genre of biographical drama with documentary. Another peculiarity of most of the films under consideration is their addition of authentic footage and complementary factual data placed in the final passage of the work, which further emphasises their educational dimension (e.g., *Ray*, 2004; *Straight Outta Compton*, 2015; *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2018). We also emphasise that while some of the films in our selection are inspired by the lives of prominent figures in the music industry, the intertextual references of these works to the person they portray are only hinted at or indirectly named (e.g., *8 Mile*, 2001 – the fictional character of rapper Jimmy “Rabbit” Smith Jr. refers to Eminem, the most popular Caucasian rapper of all time; *Last Days*, 2005 – the fictional character of musician Blake refers to Kurt Cobain, frontman of the legendary rock band Nirvana; *Stardust*, 2020 – the fictional character of Johnny Flynn represents singer David Bowie).

The fidelity of the reality represented depends on the ability and skill of the producers to insert a raw narrative into the audiovisual work, with the intention of reproducing the real lives of the portrayed persons as accurately as possible. The attempt to bring “the important” into the setting of the film is a typical feature of biopics. Indeed, its narrative in most cases focuses on presenting critical moments in the life of a certain popular personality, emphasising their socio-cultural significance and the fame achieved. The selection of certain “snippets of the whole” makes many scenes and information presented “out of context”. For example, we encounter a situation where the biographical dramas do not explain or present the actions, deeds or character traits of the personalities portrayed in a broader context (e.g., with regard to the childhood, upbringing or relationship of the protagonist with their parents), which may lead to misinterpretation of the real intentions or motivations of the respective plot referents. The “selective way” of working with the dramaturgical structure suggested above logically reduces the relevance of the depicted realities.

As we can see, the factuality of the research materials or their informational-educational character is influenced by several dramatizing factors. We are talking about those means of expression that can direct the recipient to understand the narrative value of the work and to feel a certain emotion (e.g., colour, sound in the plane of instrumentation, environment or objects and their positioning in the picture). Due to the focus of the study on a critical reflection on the relationship between the music and film industries, we concentrate on the assessment of the musical component present in the research materials, understanding music in this context as one of the basic expressive means of musical biopics – its aim is to dramatize the narrative, but it is also perceived as a “carrier” of numerous emotional meanings moving the narrative to the plane of an even more intense experience.

Based on the results of the case study, we conclude that the research materials can be viewed from three different perspectives. On the one side stand titles whose original music becomes a key part of the narrative and essentially

develops the plot forward (e.g., *Get on Up*, 2014; *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, 2020). Some of the research materials even feature more spectacular visuals, for example, related to the stage performances of the artists, making the musical aspect of the work predominate over other narrative levels (e.g., *Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2018; *Bob Dylan: A Complete Unknown*, 2024). On the other hand, we encounter a situation where the original music is indeed present, but more emphasis is placed on the narrative side of the work; in this case, the music only serves a kind of accompanying function (e.g., *8 Mile*, 2001; *Maestro*, 2023). A specific case is *Stardust* (2020), in which the original music of the performer is absent due to legal restrictions from his family members.

The degree of dramatization used in (musical) biopics varies depending on the course of actual events and the producers' decisions about specific creative approaches and methods of adaptation, or about the possibilities of depicting reality. On the other hand, however, there is the critical and viewing public, which, in assessing the quality and significance of these films, formulates specific opinions on the personalities or events depicted before seeing the audiovisual content in question. This means that prejudice is an important factor that should be minimised when assessing the quality of titles in this genre, although it is questionable whether the parties involved are able or willing to make such concessions. Loyal fans of musicians or bands tend to interpret biographical dramas in purely emotional terms, and they show dissatisfaction when their perception of a musical idol is in any way different from its cinematic depiction. A discussion of the different forms and levels of dramatization in biopics and how these elements alter the perception of real events is therefore essential. It is media (film) education that is tasked with encouraging media audiences to form their own opinions based on facts and critical thinking, rather than prejudices, emotional expressions and premature conclusions. One of its aims is to provide a space for reflection on how personal opinions, feelings or particular dramaturgical factors (e.g., the use of music, the choice of an appropriate dramaturgical structure, the degree to which factual data cooperates with fiction, etc.) can influence the interpretation of the film. In our study, we draw particular attention to the need for critical evaluation of media content, especially those that present the lives and careers of famous (musical) personalities. Indeed, we see the given approach to the analysis of biopics as crucial for the development of media literacy and critical thinking in the field of cinema and the production of film works (not only) of this genre.

In the case of biopics about musicians, it is their music that contributes greatly to the understanding of the personalities portrayed and the values they represent. This allows film producers to present famous musicians as opinion leaders or advocates for important social issues, often related to human or civil rights. Such films not only emphasise the power of the individual, but also "bring to life" significant public figures shaping the social and cultural framework of the respective era (Radošinská et al., 2022). As it seems, the basic function of musical biopics is to provide audiences with emotionally engaging portrayals of performers using original, often authentic music. Indeed, the latter becomes essential to creating the dynamic visuals that today's audiences expect and prefer. In contrast, the presentation of the lives of musical personalities is highly selective – although biographical dramas are based on historical facts, they do not depict in detail the fates of the individuals described and do not focus on portraying all the related contexts. The informative-educational nature of research materials (and also of biopics in general) is limited for this reason.

Despite the generally low reputation of biographical (musical) dramas by the professional public, stories of this genre are often considered to exemplify the creative and economic synergy of cinema and music. Examples of the successful fusion of the music and film industries and compelling models for 21st century biopics include, among others, our research materials. By critically reflecting on them, we have confirmed all our preconceived assumptions. We have shown that biopics, while respecting the relevant genre iconography, have the potential to create financially and audience successful media contents, possessing a certain "educational benefit" and a relatively high-quality level. We also note that although the results of the empirical investigation are quite limited and cannot be generalised to all films of this genre, despite this limitation of the study (and of the qualitative research itself), we have succeeded in fulfilling its main objective – discussing the conventional genre patterns and iconography of the biopic genre in the form of a critical reflection on feature-length, contemporary biographical dramas from a musical *milieu* that resonate in the world of cinema.

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