Abstract. The article pays tribute to four artists of the music scene, i.e. Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and John Luther Adams. It walks in their footsteps through their autobiographies and features the major landmarks in their artistic and creative evolution. Despite the various incongruent traits in their music style, background, or gender, music autobiographies prove to be valuable assets, based on which correlations and contrasts can be elucidated, the road to growing into an artist can be followed, and the creative spirit can be grasped. We hereby conclude that autobiographies can constitute a bridge towards the artistic soul and deepen the understanding of how these musicians project themselves as performers and position themselves in society.

Keywords: music autobiography, art, creativity, inspiration, influence

1. Introduction

The paper intends to explore how music autobiographies can serve as statements of art and creativity, how they can represent the voice of musicians and simultaneously describe the plights of society. In particular, it offers a brief excursion into the world of four artists, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and John Luther Adams. It therefore retraces the moments of paramount importance in the life and work of the aforementioned musicians by emphasizing how their music style and artistic identity have been forged. Not only does the article pinpoint to what the creators attribute their success, it also displays the inner battle the artists have faced on the bumpy road towards self-accomplishment.
In the light of these standpoints, the paper delineates the stages of their artistic development and implicitly the experiences that have marked their career or, conversely, led to temporary impasse.

In order to systematically investigate the memoirs, we have established several parameters, based on which we attempt to scan the lifeline of the artists. More precisely, we focus on the artistic impetus they recount having felt, on the personality of their music and of their groundbreaking songs as well as on some prevailing aspects of the creation process. On the other hand, within the confines of a comparative study, we analyse the common traits, permeating the career of each figure. Our choice of artists is based on their closeness in age, on their cultural impact, the wide reception of their music along with the value of the literary work itself.

We adhere to the view of life writing as a “creative practice” (Gudmunsdottir 2019: 114), as a remediation of the self rather than an unmediated reality (Gudmunsdottir 2019: 114). So, across the gender and genre divide, we attempt to show how they reconstruct the past selectively while walking the line between their private and public selves and shaping an artistic self-consciousness.

2. Autobiographies

Music autobiographies have achieved widespread recognition in the past years and have been acknowledged as having literary value by receiving important prizes such as the National Book Award in 2010 or the Norman Mailer Prize in 2011. Music itself has been awarded literary prizes such as the Pulitzer Prize for music or the Nobel Prize for Literature (Lovesey 2021: 2). They have both a literary and a cultural value by the way of “coming to an artistic self-consciousness” (Smith & Watson 2010: 169) through the narrative development.

Lejeune defines autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning their own existence, where the focus is his own life, in particular the story of his personality” (Lejeune 1989: 4). While the autobiographical pact guarantees that the narrator is the same as the author’s name on the cover that recounts some verifiable real-life events, autobiographical truth is an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader aimed at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life (Smith & Watson 2010: 13).

The discussion of life writing has to take into consideration also the fact that there is no immutable self that can remember everything that happened in the past, but there is a successive selection of events deemed important, wherefore autobiographical telling is a performative act (Smith & Watson 2010: 47). Autobiographical subjectivity can be examined by looking at the coaxers, the reason for telling their story, the sites that proved meaningful, the producers of
the story and their significant others, as the self only develops in relationship to others (Eakin 1999: 43). In studying an autobiography, we also need to question the methods of introspection. Sometimes the narrator attributes their action or choices to particular kinds of experiences – like dreams – and to intuitive knowledge (Smith & Watson 2010: 71). Alternatively, they explore the self through other media, for example, using visual means, thereby also allowing other’s images of them to flow into the text.

In the passages below, the portraits of four musicians, as illustrated through the lenses of their autobiographies, come to the forefront. We become acquainted with Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Patti Smith, and John Luther Adams and reach an understanding of their values along the memoirs, *Chronicles*, *Born to Run*, *Just Kids*, and *Silences So Deep. Music, Solitude, Alaska*.

We scrutinize the life stories in terms of the “autobiographical I’s”, namely the life experiences that have led the musicians to choose their profession and the memories the narrative voices consider significant. In addition, we study the others they relate to, the means of self-enquiry the artists employ, to paint an image of themselves, by establishing which people and topics have been meaningful to them. We again cast a glance at the places that have determined their self-realization as well as at the paratexts they use in their writing (Smith & Watson 2010: 107). In doing so, we employ a qualitative content analysis, identify meaningful patterns and common themes, and inductively develop conclusions based on these memoirs after recontextualizing our findings according to the theoretical framework of the analysed autobiographical studies (Bengtsson 2016: 8–14).¹

This presentation is closely supported by quotations from their autobiographical books with the aim to offer insights into the lyrical elements of their work and the timeless universality of their messages.

While the autobiographical narrative does not necessarily grant “true” access to an artist’s thoughts or emotions, we examine how they connect the image of their public selves with their personal introspection and how it blends into the ongoing discourse about the musicians and their music (Stein & Butler 2015: 116–117).²

### 2.1. Bob Dylan – *Chronicles*

As Bob Dylan’s life story gradually unfolds on the pages of his autobiography, *Chronicles*, we learn about the artist, the singer, the songwriter, the poet, and the person together with the events that loom as important junctures in his career.

Dylan earns reputation for the albums *The Freewheelin’ Bob Dylan*, *The Times They Are A-Changin’*, *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, *Bringing It All Back Home*,

Highway 61 Revisited, Blonde on Blonde, The Basement Tapes, John Wesley Harding, Nashville Skyline, New Morning, Blood on the Tracks, Time Out of Mind, etc. (Varesi 2004: 13–17, 31). He is awarded important recognitions, specifically 12 Grammy awards, a Golden Globe Award, an Academy Award, and the Nobel Prize for Literature (Miller 2018: 74).

His music is deeply anchored in folk songs. He states: folk songs “were the way I explored the universe” (Dylan 2004: 18), they “transcended the immediate culture” (Dylan 2004: 27), they “are evasive” (Dylan 2004: 71), have “over a thousand faces” (Dylan 2004: 71), and are “so more true to life than life itself” (Dylan 2004: 236). Yet Dylan’s input manifests itself in a creative adaptation and internalization of folk songs, through which this genre is taken to new dimensions (Hampton 2019: 26–27). Being a keen observer, he imbues his songs with his own interpretation of the world, embellishes them with own experience (Dylan 2004: 72, 121) and enriches them with features from blues, rock, gospel, and country music (Varesi 2004: 16).

In his view, songwriting requires a “new template, some philosophical identity that wouldn’t burn out” (Dylan 2004: 73). Therefore, he uses the structure of the folk songs as starting points, transfigures them into ballads, and thus engulfs them with his own emotional resonance (Dylan 2004: 227–228). Hence, Dylan describes the creation process as follows: “[…] what I did to break away was to take simple folk changes and put new imagery and attitude to them, use catchphrases and metaphor combined with a new set of ordinances that evolved into something different that had not been heard before” (Dylan 2004: 67).

How Dylan relates to music can also be depicted in his own perception of what playing implies: “I wanted to play for anybody. I could never sit in a room and just play all by myself. I needed to play for people and all the time. You can say I practiced in public and my whole life was becoming what I practiced” (Dylan 2004: 16).

Dylan’s name is interwoven with monumental songs such as Blowin’ in the Wind, which becomes a symbol of young people’s search for change (Schuman 2019: 46), and Like a Rolling Stone, which in its turn signposts a new direction of pop music (Kallen 2012: 56). In his autobiography, Bruce Springsteen recognizes the power, the novelty, and singularity of Dylan’s Like a Rolling Stone and evokes the very moment when he hears this masterpiece along these lines: “[…] gave me the faith that a true, unaltered, uncompromised vision could be broadcast to millions, changing minds, enlivening spirits, bringing red blood to the anemic American pop landscape and delivering a warning, a challenge that could become an essential part of the American conversation” (Springsteen 2016: 184).

As for the political aspects, it can be noted that Dylan’s earlier creations come to life in the turmoil of the 1960s and are regarded as protest songs or even anthems of the generation. Dylan, however, distances himself from this label (Ryan Manzella
In his memoir, he comments on it in the following manner: “[...] big bugs in the press kept promoting me as the mouthpiece, spokesman, or even conscience of a generation. That was funny. All I’d ever done was sing songs that were dead straight and expressed powerful new realities” (Dylan 2004: 115).

Through *Chronicles*, Bob Dylan will appear in our mind’s eye, stepping out, singing, playing the guitar and the harmonica. For sure, he will enchant the readers by the poetry of his words, the depth of his personality, and his reflections not only on contemporary artists but also on the weighty questions of society.

### 2.2. Bruce Springsteen – *Born to Ride*

The autobiographical work *Born to Run* is a first-hand account of Bruce Springsteen’s life, portrait, legacy, his statement of art and voice of social awareness.

His career is marked by albums like *Born to Run*, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, *The River*, *Nebraska*, *Born in the U.S.A.*, *Tunnel of Love*, *Human Touch*, *Lucky Town*, *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, *The Rising*, *Devils and Dust*, *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*, *Magic*, *Working on a Dream*, *High Hopes* and by collections of songs such as *The Promise* or *American Beauty* (Moskowitz 2015: 105–112), which make him an iconic figure in music history. For achievements on the music landscape, he has received various prizes and honours; he is the winner of Grammy awards, Golden Globe awards, and of an Academy Award for the hit *Streets of Philadelphia* (Pegels 2011: 173).

Springsteen uses his art and captures the working class, the average American, (Marcus 2004: 110), channelling his own background into his music. He affirms: “on the streets of my hometown was the beginning of my purpose, my reason, my passion. [...] in my family’s neighborhood experience, I found [...] the beginning of my song: home, roots, blood, community, responsibility, stay hard, stay hungry, stay alive” (Springsteen 2016: 266).

As a master of entertainment, he is in a permanent dialogue with his audience and enthrals them with marathon productions infused with energy, dynamism, and life (Hall 2014: 184). In his own definition, playing entails “a life-giving, joyful, sweat-drenched, muscle-aching, voice-blowing, mind-clearing, exhausting, soul-invigorating, cathartic pleasure and privilege every night” (Springsteen 2016: 186).

His legendary songs *Born to Run* and *Born in the U.S.A.* have merged into the collective consciousness of the general public (Pegels 2011: 172). The former stands for the metaphor of the drifted, of the stranded, and the bewildered in an urge to evade (Massaro 2016: 241–254). Springsteen will reminisce the creation process of the record carrying the same name as the song itself, as follows: “I wanted to craft a record that sounded like the last record on Earth, like the last
record you might hear ... the last one you’d ever NEED to hear. One glorious noise ... then the apocalypse” (Springsteen 2016: 208).

The song *Born in the U.S.A.* fuels many controversies and is subject to various interpretations. It refers to a dichotomy between patriotism and anti-Americanism, between the glorification and social criticism of Vietnam (Cavicchi 2005: XXI). In Springsteen’s recollection, it “remains one of my greatest and most misunderstood pieces of music. [...] its demand for the right of a ‘critical’ patriotic voice along with pride of birth, was too seemingly conflicting [...]” (Springsteen 2016: 314).

Springsteen’s social and political sensitivity comes to the fore during his concert in East Germany in 1988 (a year before the fall of the Berlin Wall) along with his revolutionizing message to the German audience: “I’m not here for any government. I’ve come to play rock ‘n’ roll for you in the hope that one day all the barriers will be torn down” (Kay, 2017: 34).

Likewise, his *Tunnel of Love* tour in Africa under the aegis of Amnesty International can be considered as a catalyst for the changes that have ultimately culminated in the removal of the apartheid system (Springsteen 2016: 352–354). He admits “I’d always felt rock music was a music of both personal and political liberation” (Springsteen 2016: 353). No doubt that the 9/11 events provide the inspiration for the album *Rising* (Springsteen 2016: 437–443).

Due to the complexity of his character, music, and involvement, it is impossible to grasp Bruce Springsteen’s work and life exhaustively. Therefore, the above highlights can only encompass some of the pivotal moments of his career. Similarly, the enchantment given by his music cannot be reproduced in words.

### 2.3. Patti Smith – *Just Kids*

Patti Smith’s autobiography *Just Kids* is a testament to the friendship of the singer, writer, and performer with visual artist Robert Mapplethorpe. It is an ode to their shared exploration of forms and dedication to art. Smith opens with an author's note, which can be interpreted as a defence of Mapplethorpe’s provocative work, arguing the freedom of ingenuity and the blamelessness of depicting the body and desire as topics of art.

Tracing the past in Patti Smith’s *Just Kids* is prompted by the promise made by the rock icon to her dying friend about telling the story of the unwavering confidence the two artists have in their childlike ability to animate an object with their imagination (Smith 2010: 136). They trust themselves and each another that they can see the world in a different way (Smith 2010: 136), that they will be able to challenge people outside their comfort zones and create a bond between artist and audience (Smith 2010: 218). Throughout the transformation of their relationship, they find inspiration in the books they read, the records they listen
to, the albums they look at, the exhibitions they attend, the performances they watch, and the people they meet. “Patti Smith has always measured her own life against the lives of those who have influenced her, analysts of her work would remark” (Johnstone 2017: 4).

The autobiography contemplates Smith’s birth, her religious upbringing during which she develops her love of telling stories and redirects her faith in God to a faith in the possibilities of the creative mind until the moment she intersects with Mapplethorpe. It is he who encourages her to perform and sing. *Just Kids* renders lovingly and full of elegy the life-long inspiration and support Smith and Mapplethorpe offer one another from the early stages of struggling to make ends meet up to the point when they reach a unique form of artistic expression. In this fruitful alliance with Mapplethorpe, she dedicates herself to writing, sketching, drawing, acting, and later performing, whereas he is preoccupied with drawing, crafting, collaging, sculpting, and then photographing. Mapplethorpe eventually finds fame as a visual artist, and Smith recognizes her voice at a reading event organized by Mapplethorpe for her at St Mark’s Church. On this occasion, she tailors Brecht’s, Lotte Lenya’s, Bob Dylan’s, and Lou Reed’s tradition of the speech-song to her own purpose, “infus(ing) the written word with the immediacy and frontal attack of rock and roll” (Smith 2010: 180).

With the help of the guitarist Lenny Kaye “Patti would take one of her poems, chant over a one- or two-chord guitar background, then segue out of the poem into a classic rock song” (Bockris 1999: 105).

Following the positive reception, the publishing offer for poems and further invitations to perform and record, she forms the Patti Smith Group and reaches lasting recognition for her seminal album *Horses*, for the emblematic cover of which she is photographed by Mapplethorpe. This album (1975) is born out of a strange collision of high and low art (Shaw 2008: 4) and includes one of her most famous songs, which starts with the lines based on her earlier poem *Oath*:

> Jesus died for somebody’s sins / but not mine

In *Gloria (in Excelsis Deo)*, she explores the clash between liberty and authority (Shaw 2008: 4) and recontextualizes Van Morrison’s lyrics to alter the male–female view and thus the power balance. The themes of innocence and empowerment of women appear throughout the autobiography as well, both in the metaphor of the children playfully discovering their abilities and in the image of the horse. The latter is sketched as delicate yet powerful and is associated with the iconic yet fragile Edie Sedgwick, Amelia Earhart, Anita Pallenberg, Marianne Faithfull, and Georgia O’Keeffe – bold women whom she sees as being free.

Smith’s further album, *Easter* (1976), is also a nod to art’s capacity to deeply move others and is dedicated to Arthur Rimbaud and the sculptor Constantin Brâncuși (Johnstone 2017: 87). It contains Smith’s greatest commercial hit, *Because the Night*, a collaboration with Bruce Springsteen, in which she reclaims
space and time for intimacy and love in a world oriented towards production and success. She subsequently creates her fourth album, *Wave*, and publishes her second poetry book, *Babel*, which helps her refocus her attention on her origin as a poet (Johnstone 2017: 117).

In 1980, Smith marries Fred “Sonic” Smith, and after 1982 she steps away from performing while devoting herself to raising their children. In 1988, she releases the album *Dream of Life* with Fred Smith, which not only comprises the single *Power to the People* but also exposes her concerns about contemporary social and political issues. She continues creating albums and publishing books and is named Commander of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2005 by the French Minister of Culture. In 2007, she is introduced into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and is awarded the National Book Award for *Just Kids* in 2010 (Wendell 2015: 16–17).

Patti Smith’s autobiographical work sets a monument to the purity of the artistic soul and to the creative endeavours of a time before she has reached success.


The Pulitzer-Prize-winning composer John Luther Adams’s memoire ascertains the role his prolonged stay in Alaska has played for the composer he has turned into. Nostalgically, but also critically and poetically, he meditates on his experiences there while offering the reader an unmediated approach to his work. He states: “[m]usic is my way of understanding the world, of knowing where I am and how I fit in” (Adams 2020: 4).

Born in 1953, Adams grows up in awe of Martin Luther King, taking part in civil rights marches and anti-war protests: “[a]s a composer I believe that music has the power to inspire a renewal of human consciousness, culture and politics. And yet I refuse to make political art” (Adams 2020: 6).

In his youth, he spends much time absorbed in literature and in the music of Frank Zappa, Coltrane, John Cage, Edgar Varèse, and Igor Stravinsky. At the age of twenty, he is one of the first students to graduate from the California Institute of the Arts. There, under the influence of his teachers, mentors, and colleagues, such as Peter Garland, he comes to the conclusion that music does not have to be complicated to be good. It can be alluring and of quality at the same time. During his studies, he wins the second prize for an organ composition, and, supported by Lou Harrison, he decides on becoming a composer.

Upon graduating, he creates his first orchestral works and engages in environmental politics. In his creations, he is inspired by Oliver Messiaen, and due to his own love of nature he embeds birdsongs in his compositions. In *songbirdsongs*, “by providing the performers with only an event map, individual musical phrases, and performance instructions that reflect the singing behaviour
of each featured bird species, Adams preserves the essential freedom of birdsong” (Herzogenrath 2012: 11).

In order to embrace environmental causes, he moves to Alaska. This change feels like running away from the uncertainties of a life, which has not seemed fulfilling. It is as a director of the Environmental Center in Fairbanks that he attains a sense of belonging. Likewise, in Alaska, he meets his second wife, Cindy, and finds kindred artistic spirits in the poet John Haines, whose poems he puts to music and whose lyrics also inspire the title of the autobiography. Through their work, he acquires the skill to “search for the music within words” (Adams 2020: 64). In Fairbanks, he also meets Gordon Wright, professor and Musical Director of the Fairbanks Symphony Orchestra, who assists him in developing his orchestration.

Drawing inspiration from Thoreau’s Walden in the northern silence and landscape, he learns to “listen deeply to this world that we share” (Adams 2020: 6). However, he does not “represent nature through music. He creates tonal territories that resonate with nature” (Herzogenrath 2012: 1). In this way, he enriches the musical texture by using it to recreate cosmic phenomena. “The Light That Fills the World, Dark Wind, The Farthest Place, and the Immeasurable Space of Tones can all be seen as ‘lightscape’ compositions – sonic equivalents of the natural cycles of light that occur in the atmosphere of Alaska, and universal characteristics of light itself” (Herr 2012: 188).

Adams relishes the sense of community characteristic of Alaska. He incorporates native rhythms into his work, with the explicit permission of the local tribes and, in return, makes a small contribution by creating melodies that help children learn their native languages. He also agrees to their view that art connects all fabric of life rather than just being a means of self-expression (Adams 2020: 100). The piece Inuksuit can be considered as the best example in this respect. “It was only when I heard the first performance of Inuksuit that I realized that this is a piece about community. Although the experience of each solitary listener is unique, out of the experience of shared solitude an extraordinary sense of community emerges” (Adams 2021: 136).

Adams’s prolific output in vocal, symphonic, operatic, and electronic music culminates in Become Ocean, which is awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2014. He also receives the Grammy Award in 2015 (Herzogenrath 2020: 259). Music critic Alex Ross reports on the premiere of this work as “the loveliest apocalypse in musical history”, “a disorienting, unsettling creation”, “a gigantic palindrome, ending where it began” (Ross 2013).

While John Luther Adams leaves Alaska for longer periods to teach at Harvard or at Oberlin, after 2014, he eventually moves to Mexico, with the realization that

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the “visions of music and of the world that emerged in that cabin have sustained me ever since” (Adams 2020: 76).

He references this continuation and progression in the piece Become Desert. By exploring the orchestration of space, Adams regards himself as working towards a new culture in the hope of discovering a new way of being on this planet (Adams 2021: 138).

3. Comparative study

This section proposes to explore the common threads running through the artists’ rich experiences as perceived in their autobiographies. It expounds some of the aspects pertaining to their struggle for success, surveys the major influences that have left their imprints on the musicians’ style, and, finally, sheds light on important sites that have a direct impact on their work.

In general, as Chronicles and Born to Run predominantly illustrate, the way to public recognition has often been overshadowed. From time to time, the studied musicians will have to reconfigure their creation process, readapt their style, and deal with the emotional load of nadir. Similarly, staying on track requires a lot of effort. Bob Dylan admits: “[m]y own songs had become strangers to me” (Dylan 2004: 148). His inner duel is described in the following lines: “I felt done for, an empty burn-out wreck. [...] I’m a ‘60s troubadour, a folk-rock relic, a wordsmith from bygone days [...]. I’m in the bottomless pit of cultural oblivion” (Dylan 2004: 147).

Undoubtedly, Dylan will be reborn and will reinvent himself. He confesses: “[b]ut then miraculously something internal came unhinged” (Dylan 2004: 151), “[e]verything came back, and it came back in multidimension” (Dylan 2004: 153). His revelation is dressed up in the words: “I had a gut feeling that I had created a new genre” (Dylan 2004: 155) or “I realized that this way of playing would revitalize my world” (Dylan 2004: 157).

To the same extent, Bruce Springsteen does not believe in insurmountable difficulties either. The zeal for a constant remodelling and improving accompanies his entire career path. He reckons that the combination of talent, persistence, and hard work are the prerequisite for success (Springsteen 2016: 215). His perseverance serves as the perfect ingredient in the pursuit of perfection. “I had to make a record that was the embodiment of what I’d been slowly promising I could do. It had to be something epic and extraordinary, something hadn’t quite been heard before” (Springsteen 2016: 203).

In the quest to find his inner voice, Bob Dylan has been powerfully influenced by folk singer and songwriter Woody Guthrie. In fact, this bond is so strong that he even writes one of his earliest creations, entitled Song to Woody, for his hero
Music Autobiographies – Performing Selves

(Varesi 2004: 22). Dylan will remember the Guthrie-experience in the following way: “Guthrie had such a grip on things. He was so poetic and tough and rhythmic. There was so much intensity, and his voice was like a stiletto. He was like none of the singers I ever heard, and neither were his songs” (Dylan 2004: 244).

On the other hand, Springsteen’s musical development is profoundly marked by the point when he first sees Elvis on the Ed Sullivan Show. In his autobiography, he names this event as “the big bang” (Springsteen 2016: 38–40). Within the same show, he gets to know The Beatles, a memory that is presented as the “second coming” in his book (Springsteen 2016: 48–49). Aside from that, he has been influenced by Woody Guthrie (Springsteen 2016: 254) and views Sinatra, Dylan, and The Rolling Stones as his idols. For this reason, he applauds the very moment when the opportunity to sing with the Stones comes along (Springsteen 2016: 490).

Concerning the important sites in the artists’ life and work, it can be outlined that Dylan’s, Springsteen’s, and Smith’s debut is closely linked to New York. As a matter of fact, in the 1960s, Dylan comes to this city in order to meet Guthrie, and thus he gets to be introduced to the music scene of his time (Sawyers Skinner 2011: 12–13). Springsteen, being from New Jersey, will cling to the same area. He even exclaims: “New York City […]. We had to break in there” (Springsteen 2016: 91). Obviously, he spreads his wings to other geographical areas, but eventually returns to his roots: “I had to get back to where I was who I was, a son of New Jersey, gunslinger, bar band king, small-town local hero, big fish in a little pond and breadwinner” (Springsteen 2016: 163).

Again, Patti Smith arrives in New York with the dream of entering “the fraternity of the artist […] both muse and maker” (Smith 2010: 12). She harbours this dream, influenced by the works and lives of Picasso, Diego Rivera, and Frida Kahlo.

In the early days of her stay, while at a Doors concert, she feels both a kinship to Jim Morrison and a hyperawareness that performing in such a manner is something she could also do (Smith 2010: 59). This episode suggests she has always been preparing to become just the rock and roll star she is seen as. Alongside Mapplethorpe, she explores the possibilities and connections the city offers, and soon they gather an impressive array of significant cultural personalities around them. Essential to this effect is their stay at the Chelsea Hotel, where they meet Sandy Daley and where Janis Joplin becomes an acquaintance whom Smith writes a song for. Through the people at Chelsea and in the neighbourhood, Smith also gets to know and exchange ideas with Jimi Hendrix, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Bob Neuwirth, who encourages her to write a song. Her future friendship with Sandy Pearlman, a music critic and producer, will also shape her style.

With her writing, she inscribes herself in the tradition of Romanticism and French Symbolism by cherishing extraordinary individuals and a personal
encoding of language by placing an emphasis on imagination and by the aesthetic inclusion of any artistic motif. Her biggest literary models are William Blake, Arthur Rimbaud, and Jean Genet, whereas from the playwright Sam Shepard she gathers the value of improvisation.

Smith adopts and adapts all the ideas and voices that have touched her, with her own spin, growing into a complete artist. With Bob Dylan, at one of her concerts, she muses: “I had to become fully myself in the presence of the one I had modeled myself after” (Smith 2010: 248). *Just Kids* is therefore a compliment to Smith’s friend, to her youth but also to her idols; thus, it is all too suitable that in the foreword she places the autobiography under the scope of the aria *Vissi d’arte* from *Tosca*, praising a life devoted to art and love.

Evidently, John Luther Adams is an artist who is also open to different types of aesthetic experiences. He studies not only Western classical music, such as Debussy, Sibelius, and Bruckner, but also shows an interest in recordings of Javanese, Balinese, Japanese, Indian, and African music and instruments. Similarly, he feels attracted to rock and roll and jazz, to The Beatles and John Coltrane, to literature and nature (Adams 2020: 168–169).

His meeting and collaboration with Alaskan poet John Haines provides him with the “temerity to entertain artistic aspirations to match the landscapes of Alaska” (Adams 2020: 68). What he strives for and achieves to do is to sonically recreate the feeling of vastness of Alaska, a loss “of scale and distance – floating in undifferentiated space, suspended in time” (Adams 2020: 73). Owing to John Luther Adams’s close friendship to Gordon Wright, both a conductor and a violinist, he composes music for strings, an example being *The Wind in High Places*. Adams and his fellow artist share the “quest to see clearly and to speak truthfully” (Adams 2020: 161).

Upon reflection whether it is Alaska that has defined his style of composing, John Luther Adams realizes, however, that his creations are just a natural progression from his early years (Adams 2020: 175). Alaska has echoed in his inner self, making him more aware of his thoughts and feelings, which materialize in a heightened form through music: “I began to feel that my music was no longer about a place, but had in a real sense become a place of its own” (Adams 2020: 176).

What distinguishes creative minds is that “the individual no longer passively accepts external authority, but starts listening to his or her inner voice and making judgements based on his or her own standards” (Kaufman & Gregoire 2015: 134).

Dylan, Springsteen, Smith, and John Luther Adams have in common that they approach issues unprejudiced, which helps them reach original solutions and enlightening truths people can identify with.

Another trait that artists share is the openness to try and absorb new things and information. This capacity endows them with a more elaborate knowledge base from which to generate novel ideas. Moreover, it prompts them to identify
opportunities for creation. They derive pleasure from the sustained engagement with complex issues and are intrinsically motivated by the attempt to put across their potential they are already aware of (Batey & Hughes 2017: 196).

The four artists we have focused our study on guide themselves by these principles. They actively integrate art in their daily lives, dedicate themselves to continuously exploring new forms, and involve themselves with art and nature, keeping an attentive mind to their surroundings. This incites their own artistic output as a way to mark their being in the world.

Through the episodes and musings they recount, they also paint a historical moment, the portrait of the community and the society they were part of. What is more, Smith, Adams, and Springsteen underpin their autobiographies with photos of the people, places, and times that have impacted their lives, hence offer another medium of self-presentation.

As seen above, the launching and the developing of the artists’ musical career have asked for sacrifices, commitment, and endurance. The potential threat of derailment and the feeling of insecurity have lurked around many corners. Still, the willingness to achieve their dreams has far outweighed the difficulties. This ongoing quest to discover and engage themselves in the world has allowed them to envision success. In the same manner, the direct and indirect artistic encounters as well as the significant scenes in the lives of the four musicians have immensely affected their creative evolution, leading them to self-awareness and self-accomplishment.

4. Conclusions

We have provided an overview of four different contemporary artists whose autobiographies have appeared since 2004. While their situations differ based on background, gender, or music style, we have shown how they all use their memoirs to position themselves in relation to their fellows, to society, and art.

Along the autobiographies Chronicles, Born to Run, Just Kids, and Silences So Deep. Music, Solitude, Alaska, we have disclosed Bob Dylan’s, Bruce Springsteen’s, Patti Smith’s, and John Luther Adams’s vibrant personality, the paths they have pursued towards creating a cohesive image of self, reconstructed from pieces of their past. They establish a deeper connection to their public by presenting themselves as complex personalities while experiencing success, recognition, but also frustrations and difficulties. We gain an understanding of the challenges they have overcome, of the values they have promoted and represent and, through this, of their own perspective on their role on the music scene and within society. Bob Dylan’s, Bruce Springsteen’s, Patti Smith’s, and John Luther Adams’s autobiographies consolidate their artistic personae concomitantly with
further stirring their supporters and unlocking fascination in their readers. These books can therefore be regarded as a pledge to art and, implicitly, to literature, a depiction of the performing selves.

References


