

## **How Music Tells a Story:**

Intertextuality in Stephen Chbosky's Novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*

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**Abstract**

This thesis examines the role of music as an intertextual element in Stephen Chbosky's 1999 novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Focusing on thirteen songs included on a mix tape that the protagonist Charlie creates, this study analyzes how the songs interact with the novel's narrative and reflect the protagonist's life and emotional experiences. Drawing on theories of intertextuality by Julia Kristeva and Gérard Genette, this thesis argues that the songs function as expressive elements in Charlie's life. The analysis and the songs are divided into three thematic sections – love and longing, trauma and grief, and healing and acceptance – which demonstrate how the songs mirror Charlie's emotional development and story. The findings show that the songs contribute significantly to the novel's narrative structure and themes as well as offer insight into Charlie's identity formation and emotional journey.

**Key words:** *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, intertextuality, song lyrics, popular music, trauma, identity formation

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## 1 Introduction

Stephen Chbosky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999) is a coming-of-age story deeply concerned with emotional experience and identity formation. The novel is written in the form of letters, which are directed to an unknown person and written by the protagonist Charlie. During his first year of high school, Charlie navigates through a life of new friendships, first love, trauma, and grief. Music has a central role in Charlie's life, functioning as an emotional language through which he processes experiences. Specific songs appear throughout the novel and some of them accompany key moments in the story. Early in the novel, Charlie gives a mix tape to his friend Patrick as a Christmas present. On the A side of the mix tape, Charlie has put songs that he thinks Patrick would like. However, for the B side he has chosen thirteen songs that are important to himself.

In this thesis, I argue that the thirteen songs referenced in the novel function as meaningful intertextual elements, which contribute to the novel's narrative as well as reflect Charlie's emotional landscape and identity formation. Rather than serving only as cultural references, the songs form a dialogic relationship with the text. They help structure Charlie's emotional journey, as well as reflect his gradual movement from loneliness and repression toward healing and growth. The aim of this thesis is to analyze how the selected songs interact with the narrative of the novel, and how they reflect themes of love, grief, trauma, and recovery. By examining how the songs function as intertextual and expressive elements, this study highlights the importance of music and song lyrics as a narrative tool in the novel.

Even though the novel does not include the lyrics of the songs themselves, the songs are still explicitly named, and some occasionally referenced, which prompts the reader to consider their lyrical content alongside the narrative. This thesis therefore brings the lyrics into the analysis as an intertextual frame, through which Charlie's emotional experiences can be interpreted.

Many of the songs on the mix tape have their own contexts, histories, and the artists' intended meanings, and listeners may have their own interpretations. However, this study does not aim to determine the correct or original meaning of the songs. Instead, the analysis focuses on how the lyrics resonate with the novel and how they reflect Charlie's life. The songs' broader cultural and contextual backgrounds may be useful with a different approach, but I did not find the need, nor the space, to consider them here.

Although *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* has received considerable scholarly attention, much of the existing research has focused solely on mental health or trauma portrayed in the novel. Those studies highlight the novel's significant themes, but they leave other aspects of the narrative's construction less explored. Intertextuality is one aspect I could not find major work on, except for Ingri Wahlstrøm's (2014) master's thesis, which examines intertextuality in the book through the classic novels Charlie reads. However, her focus is on the literary references in the book, which leaves a gap for the role of music to be studied. By focusing on musical references, this thesis aims to extend the discussion of intertextuality in the novel.

After the theoretical framework of intertextuality is outlined, the analysis is divided into three thematic sections. The first section examines songs that reflect Charlie's experiences of love and longing, particularly in relation to his friend and love interest Sam. The second section focuses on songs that reflect themes of trauma and grief, and the final one explores songs that represent healing, growth, and acceptance.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

The primary theoretical framework for this thesis is intertextuality. The concept of intertextuality was first introduced by Julia Kristeva. In her essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel”, Kristeva, drawing from Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, states that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 1980, 66). Therefore, meaning emerges from interaction and overlap. In the novel, the songs are absorbed into the narrative, hence their lyrical meaning emerges through this interaction and dialogue between the songs and the narrative.

Bakhtin’s dialogism is further explained by Kristeva. She states that the “literary word” is not a point with a fixed meaning, but rather “an *intersection of textual surfaces*, [...] a dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context” (Kristeva 1980, 65). This dialogic understanding of language is particularly useful for analyzing the novel. The songs Charlie listens to and shares through the mix tape add textual voices that help express what he does not, or cannot, say directly. In this sense, the songs and narrative coexist dialogically: the novel is a space where literary narration and popular music intersect to produce meaning.

While Kristeva and Bakhtin emphasize the dialogic nature of texts, Gérard Genette offers a more restrictive definition of intertextuality. He defines it as “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts”, that is “as the actual presence of one text within another” (Genette [1982] 1997, 1–2). For instance, the other text could be a quotation or an allusion (Genette [1982] 1997, 2). Since the lyrics of the songs are not quoted in the novel, the song titles themselves take the form of an allusion, which means that its “full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text” (ibid.). Because of the lack of direct quotes from the songs, in my analysis, I have looked into the songs’ lyrical content to see what themes and elements resonate with Charlie’s experiences in the narrative.

In this case, understanding the relationship between the songs and the narrative depends on whether the reader is familiar with the songs. Thus, readers who are familiar might recognize their intertextual meaning, while unfamiliar readers can still understand their emotional associations through narrative context. In both cases, the songs function as meaningful textual elements and contribute to the story, allowing them to operate as an integral part of the novel’s narrative.

In addition to these theories of intertextuality, it is also important to consider why song lyrics themselves are meaningful subjects of analysis. As Simon Frith argues, listeners often approach popular music through its words, because “words matter to people” and “are central to how pop songs are heard and evaluated” (Frith 1996, 159). In this regard, lyrics do not matter because of their literal content alone, but because they shape how listeners understand the song and engage with it. Frith’s perspective supports treating lyrics as expressive elements that participate in the novel’s intertextual dialogue and contribute to how Charlie’s feelings are articulated and interpreted.

### 3 Analysis

Music in the novel is not merely background decoration, nor the songs referenced in the book arbitrarily chosen. The thirteen songs that Charlie includes on the B side of the mix are carefully chosen and deeply meaningful to him. Charlie emphasizes the emotional significance of these songs and describes how he “spent all night working on” the mix tape, and highlights that the songs mean a great deal to him (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 66–67). When Charlie holds the finished tape in his hand, he reflects on how it contains “memories and feelings and great joy and sadness”, and how people have lived through both good and bad times with the songs (*ibid.*). For Charlie, music is a way to reflect on life.

In addition to giving Patrick a mix tape, Charlie also makes mix tapes for specific moments, such as his first long drive, because he believes that songs hold memories and through music he can revisit them later in life (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 99). This reflects what Tia DeNora argues about music’s capacity to “reorient awareness” and draw individuals back into emotionally charged experiences and relationships (DeNora [2003] 2009, 61–62). For Charlie, songs are tied to particular moments and people, and listening to them allows him to return to those memories and feelings. Making mix tapes for others becomes a way to share these emotional associations, express affection, and create connections. These gestures suggest that music is central to how Charlie sees himself and the people around him. This also aligns with Frith’s view that musical experience provides “a way of being in the world, a way of making sense of it” (Frith 1996, 272). For Charlie, this mix tape and music overall is not only a source of comfort but also a way to better understand himself, his emotions, relationships, and life.

#### 3.1 Songs of Love and Longing

The first group of songs I analyze in this section reflect Charlie’s feelings of love and longing, which center on his relationship with Sam. Sam, Patrick’s stepsister, is one of the first people who shows Charlie genuine kindness and acceptance when he begins high school. Alongside Patrick, she introduces him to a new social world and makes him feel seen at a time when he is lonely. Therefore, it is not surprising that Charlie quickly develops romantic feelings for her. Approaching these songs as intertextual references, allows their lyrical themes to illuminate aspects of Charlie’s emotional life that remain unspoken in the narrative itself.

Although Charlie does not give the mix tape to Sam, these specific songs on the B side nevertheless reflect his emotional experience concerning her. Charlie presents the songs as

something deeply personal for him, and their themes of love, longing and idealization closely align with Charlie's feelings toward Sam. This dynamic reflects what Frith argues about love songs: they do not "cause people to fall in love, but provide people with the means to articulate feelings associated with being in love" (Frith 1996, 164–165). In Frith's view, love songs become narratives through which people engage with and realize their own fantasies (ibid.). In this sense, the songs Charlie chooses give form to emotions he cannot directly express to Sam. This reinforces the idea that music functions as a key expressive element in Charlie's emotional life.

"Nights in White Satin" (1967) by The Moody Blues expresses how deeply Charlie cares for Sam, and how in love with her he really is. The repetition of the lyric "I love you" ("Nights in White Satin" 1967) is a clear indication of this deep love for her. From the very first moment Charlie meets Sam, he is already mesmerized by her beauty and feels like she is the first girl he would like to ask out one day (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 21–22). After only knowing her for a month, he already loves her and adores her, and thinks Sam is "the prettiest and nicest person in the whole world" (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 51). Even though they have not known each other that long, in Charlie's head Sam is already perfect.

In addition, Charlie always puts Sam's feelings first, and at the end of the day just wants her to be happy, which the lyric "Just what you want to be, you will be in the end" ("Nights in White Satin" 1967) reflects. After Sam breaks up with her boyfriend, the only thing Charlie cares about is Sam being upset (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 192–193). He does not think that now is his chance to finally be with Sam, he only cares about what Sam wants. He values her happiness above his own and loves her without needing anything in return.

Since Charlie tries not to think about Sam in a romantic way, and consequently does not try to pursue her, Sam is essentially someone he can only dream about. This theme is disclosed in The Smashing Pumpkins' song "Daydream" (1991). It reflects Charlie's longing for Sam and that the love he has for her is unrequited. The title of the song itself, as well as the line "My daydream screams bitter 'til the end" ("Daydream" 1991) indicate how Sam is this dream in Charlie's head that he can only wish would come true. Charlie's care and love for Sam is not returned, at least not in the same way. Sam does love Charlie as well but only "in a friend way" (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 73), which makes the situation bitter.

The repetition of the line “I’m going crazy” (“Daydream” 1991) in the song captures the emotional instability that underlies Charlie’s infatuation with Sam. This is especially evident when Charlie hears Sam and her boyfriend, Craig, having sex (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 102). The emotional shock of hearing them leads Charlie to finally understand the ending of a poem he read out loud to his friends earlier in the novel (*ibid.*). The poem Charlie refers to was allegedly someone’s suicide note (Chbosky [1999] 2012 77–78). This suggests that Charlie has suicidal thoughts when he hears Sam having sex with someone other than himself. Even if these feelings are fleeting, they indicate a dangerous identification with his feelings for Sam. However, the lyrics “I don’t want feelings / Your feelings” (“Daydream” 1991) suggest that Charlie does not want to feel this way. He longs to stop feeling as deeply as he does for Sam (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 121). Charlie knows that loving Sam does not do any good for him, but he cannot help it.

Because Charlie’s love for Sam is very deep, there is not much Sam, or anyone else, could do to make Charlie stop loving her. This can be seen in the lyrics of the song “Vapour Trail” (1990) by Ride: “The sun will blind my eyes, I love you anyway”. This line symbolizes how Charlie loves Sam almost blindly, and even if he gets hurt it will not stop him from loving her. Sam can date other people, like Craig, and Charlie still loves her. The lyric “You are a vapour trail in a deep blue sky” (“Vapour Trail” 1990) extends the idea of distant and unattainable love. A vapour trail is beautiful but fleeting, visible only for a moment before it fades away. It is out of Charlie’s reach like Sam, who has a boyfriend, is older, and will soon leave for college. Charlie can only admire her from afar, being aware that their time together is only temporary. The “deep blue sky” indicates vastness and loneliness, which reflect Charlie’s emotional landscape: wide open, full of longing, yet fundamentally solitary.

Throughout the novel, Charlie mostly keeps his feelings inside, and never fully expresses them. When Sam later asks him why he never said anything after she and Craig broke up, Charlie says that he wanted to prioritize her happiness over the chance of being with her (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 214). The song’s final line, “We never have enough time to show our love” (“Vapour Trail” 1990), is very crucial, because it captures this unfulfilled potential between Charlie and Sam. Charlie did not realize that he could have had a chance with Sam if he had only acted on his feelings. (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 216). This shows that when love is kept hidden, it cannot grow. Charlie’s restraint, though kind and selfless, ultimately prevented a deeper connection from forming. Charlie and Sam could have had time to form a deeper relationship, but because Charlie kept everything inside, it is now too late.

Charlie's restraint and silence, as reflected in "Vapour Trail" (1990), also stem from the belief that he never had a real chance with Sam. Early in the novel, Sam tells Charlie not to think about her in a romantic way (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 24), and Charlie takes her words literally. From that day forward, he internalizes his feelings and does not open up about them to Sam. At the same time, he kind of convinces himself that loving Sam is something forbidden and to have her love Charlie back is an impossible task.

This sense of impossibility of a relationship is captured well in Simon & Garfunkel's song "Scarborough Fair" (1966), which lists unattainable conditions for love to be fulfilled. For example, the speaker in the song asks for "a cambric shirt / [...] / Without seams nor needle work", and "an acre of land / [...] / Between the salt water and the sea strands" ("Scarborough Fair" 1966), which is not possible. Charlie builds similar emotional barriers for himself: "Sam did look very pretty in her dress, but I was trying not to notice because I'm trying not to think of her that way" (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 41). He tries hard to push his feelings away, because he thinks that is what Sam wants. But as we find out at the end of the novel that Sam only wanted him to be honest (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 214–216), it becomes clearer that Charlie has set these impossible standards for him by himself. This leaves him unable to act on his feelings even when Sam was, in fact, within reach.

Whereas "Scarborough Fair" (1966) reflects Charlie's self-imposed emotional distance, Suzanne Vega's song "Gypsy" (1987), like Ride's "Vapour Trail" (1990), captures the fleeting nature of the bond that does exist between Charlie and Sam. In the song, the momentariness that defines Charlie and Sam's relationship is continued. The line "You come from far away" ("Gypsy" 1987) mirrors the gap between Charlie and Sam's worlds. Sam comes from a different group of people than Charlie is used to, and she is older and more experienced, while Charlie is still learning what it means to love someone. To him, Sam is unfamiliar, yet captivating.

Charlie and Sam will also face an inevitable parting when Sam leaves for college, which the lines "And we'll blow away forever soon / And go on to different lands" (ibid.) foreshadow. However, the line "But with me you will stay" (ibid.) indicates that, no matter what, Sam will stay in Charlie's heart. Charlie's reaction to when Sam packs for college captures this sentiment well as he tries to remember as much as he can about her (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 213). Sam is someone who Charlie wants to hold close to his heart, even after she leaves. The line "And you will hear yourself in song" ("Gypsy" 1987) mirrors Charlie's narrative voice.

Whether through the letters he writes, or the mix tape itself, Sam remains present in his creative expression. “Gypsy” (1987) perfectly captures the beauty as well as the melancholy of Charlie’s love for Sam, which is brief, unfulfilled, yet genuine.

### 3.2 Songs of Trauma and Grief

It is evident that Charlie has gone through a lot of trauma in his life, and in addition to the songs about love, there are several songs that reveal deeper emotional wounds that he carries. The loss of Charlie’s Aunt Helen on his seventh birthday on Christmas had a big impact on Charlie’s mental health. His aunt’s passing caused him to go to “a bad place” mentally and eventually he had to be taken to the doctor (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 78–79). Every Christmas his mental health starts to deteriorate, because of the negative connotations of the holiday. At the end of the novel, Charlie’s trauma resurfaces and he realizes that his aunt used to sexually abuse him when he was a child. In the beginning of the novel, we also find out that Charlie’s friend Michael took his own life the previous spring, which is another source of his trauma and grief. From an intertextual perspective, the following songs deepen the novel’s portrayal of trauma by echoing the emotional states that Charlie struggles to articulate directly.

“Asleep” (1987) by The Smiths is the first song on the mix tape. It seems to be the most meaningful one to Charlie as well, as it appears again as the last song on the tape, and it is also the song he mentions the most throughout the book. The repetition of the line “Sing me to sleep” (“Asleep” 1987) suggests Charlie’s recurring longing for peace and escape. Lyrics like “Don’t try to wake me in the morning” and “I will feel so glad to go” (ibid.) hold a deeply suicidal theme in the song. While Charlie does not explicitly state a desire to end his life, there are several moments in the novel that indicate that Charlie has those kinds of thoughts. For example, after Christmas, when Charlie comes home from visiting his aunt’s grave, he thinks about wanting to “sleep for a thousand years” or “not exist” (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 100). Charlie’s wish to sleep here has the same meaning as in the song “Asleep” (1987): a form of rest that means freedom from pain, from thought, and possibly from life itself.

Charlie’s negative reaction to Christmas and his birthday is better understood by Cathy Caruth’s explanation of trauma as “the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in [...] repetitive phenomena” (Caruth [1996] 2016, 94). For Charlie, this repetitive phenomenon appears around Christmas and his birthday, because he associates them with the death of his aunt, which explains why he often goes “to a bad place” around that time (Chbosky [1999] 2012,

78). Because Aunt Helen died in a car crash while she was on her way to buy Charlie a birthday gift, Charlie carries a deep sense of guilt for her death, because he partly blames himself (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 98). This unresolved guilt and grief resurface each year and continue to have power over the present time. The line “Don’t feel bad for me” (“Asleep” 1987) may therefore reflect Charlie’s complicated relationship with this guilt. The wish in the lines “I don’t want to wake up / On my own anymore” (ibid.) indicates Charlie’s loneliness after the loss of both his Aunt Helen and his friend Michael. Charlie’s aunt’s death leaves a deep hole in his life and Michael’s death causes Charlie to be lonely. These great losses leave Charlie to wake up to a world where they no longer exist, which he is tired of.

Themes of loss and absence in Charlie’s life are continued in Nick Drake’s song “Time of No Reply” (1986). However, the focus shifts from longing for escape to confronting the silence that follows loss. The line “The sun went down and the crowd went home” (ibid.) indicates the end of day, or symbolically, the end of life in this case. The line reflects Michael’s suicide and Aunt Helen’s death, which both leave Charlie in darkness. The following line “And I was left by the roadside all alone” (ibid.), mirrors Charlie’s loneliness and the sense of being abandoned by those who once made him feel like he belonged somewhere. The song’s title itself reflects the painful reality that Charlie can no longer communicate with Michael or Helen. Their absence is permanent. This silence can also be compared to the fact that Michael never left a note (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 5–6). “No reply” becomes literal, a devastating reminder that he will never understand why his friend took his own life. If Michael had left a note, like Charlie says, “It might have made sad sense” (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 6), but instead Charlie is left with unanswered questions.

What deepens this sense of unresolved loss is the lyric “There’s no hello and no goodbye” (“Time of No Reply” 1986). Charlie never had the chance to say goodbye to his aunt before her accident (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 97), nor to Michael before his suicide. This lack of closure leaves him unable to fully move forward. The line “But I have my answers as I look to the sky” (“Time of No Reply” 1986) also suggests that Charlie’s only remaining connection to them is spiritual, as they now only exist in his memory. While “Asleep” (1987) expresses the wish to join the dead, Nick Drake’s song acknowledges the permanence of loss and the silence that follows it.

The third song that reflects the trauma Charlie has experienced is Procol Harum’s “A Whiter Shade of Pale” (1967). The song’s lyrics mark the moment when Charlie’s deepest layer of

trauma finally surfaces: the repressed memories of sexual abuse by his Aunt Helen. Such lyrics as “I was feeling kinda seasick / [...] / The room was humming harder / As the ceiling flew away” (“A Whiter Shade of Pale” 1967), mirror Charlie’s feeling of panic and dissociation when Sam touches him under his pants (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 216–217). He is overwhelmed by this sudden and unexplainable terror and starts to lose his grasp on reality. This is evident when he starts to fall asleep and tells Sam that “I can’t do that anymore”, but realizes he is no longer talking to Sam but to somebody else (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 218).

When Sam touches Charlie, it brings up memories of his Aunt Helen doing the same thing. This depiction of trauma resurfacing is parallel to Caruth’s explanation, which she draws from Sigmund Freud, that trauma is “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. [...] an event that [...] is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again” (Caruth [1996] 2016, 3–4). Charlie’s traumatic memory of abuse was not fully known, nor understood, when it was happening. Charlie was very young when he experienced this trauma, and therefore it was blocked from his consciousness. The memories were buried deep in his mind, until they now return, years later, through this overwhelming sensory flashback. The line “That her face at first just ghostly / Turned a whiter shade of pale” (“A Whiter Shade of Pale” 1967) parallels the moment when Sam tells Charlie that he looks “white as a sheet” (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 218), as the repressed memories force themselves to Charlie’s mind. The lyric could also reflect Sam’s own reaction: her shock and fear when she realizes that something is deeply wrong.

Charlie’s post-traumatic state the next morning when he is awake but detached from reality is captured well, as the song continues with the lines “And although my eyes were open / They might have just as well been closed” (“A Whiter Shade of Pale” 1967). Charlie hears songs on the radio and sees television shows on the TV that are not actually playing (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 219–220). His eyes are open, yet he does not see clearly. Caruth’s ([1996] 2016, 4) description that trauma “returns to haunt the survivor later on” captures this moment well. The past events impose themselves violently onto the present, and break Charlie’s sense of reality. The song thus becomes a haunting reflection of Charlie’s breakdown. While “Asleep” (1987) expresses Charlie’s wish for peace and “Time of No Reply” (1986) conveys grief and silence, “A Whiter Shade of Pale” (1967) reflects the moment of truth. The forgotten past is finally remembered, and Charlie begins the painful but necessary process of healing

### 3.3 Songs of Healing, Growth, and Acceptance

While many of the songs on the mix tape mirror the negative aspects in Charlie's life, such as unrequited love, trauma, and loss, the final songs move toward themes of healing. The last five songs, four of which appear before "Asleep" (1987) reappears at the very end, carry a distinct sense of hope and emotional growth. Through an intertextual lens, these later songs reflect the narrative's shift toward recovery, and mirror Charlie's gradual healing process.

The song "MLK" by U2 (1984) resonates deeply with Charlie's emotional state and journey toward healing. The tenderness of the lyrics "Sleep tonight / And may your dreams / Be realized" ("MLK" 1984) suggest the peace and rest that Charlie greatly needs after the emotional turmoil he has experienced. This wish for sleep reflects not only physical rest but also emotional release, which is something Charlie experiences when he is hospitalized for two months after finding out the truth about his aunt (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 225–226). The song's recurring image of sleep connects back to "Asleep" (1987) by The Smiths, but whereas that song represented a longing for escape, "MLK" (1984) transforms the idea of sleep into a symbol of comfort and emotional recovery.

"Dear Prudence" (1968) by The Beatles also carries a hopeful theme. The song feels like an encouragement to Charlie to keep living life after bad times. The repeated lines "won't you come out to play? / [...] greet the brand new day" ("Dear Prudence" 1968) speak directly to one of Charlie's main struggles, which is his tendency to observe others rather than participate in life with them. Other people, like his teacher Bill, notices this and encourages Charlie to participate more (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 26). The song has this same idea and urges Charlie to get out of his head and step into real life.

Throughout the novel, Charlie constantly puts others' needs above his own. The lines "The wind is low, the birds will sing / That you are part of everything" ("Dear Prudence" 1968) reinforce this idea that Charlie must see his own value, and realize that he is as much part of the world as anyone else, and that sometimes he can put himself first and just enjoy life. The encouraging line toward the end of the song, "So let me see you smile again" ("Dear Prudence" 1968), reflects that the people around Charlie care about him, and want him to find moments of happiness during this tough time. Overall, the song reflects the love and support that surround Charlie and encourages him to keep on living and find happiness again.

The song “Dusk” (1970) by Genesis, continues with the theme of emotional recovery, but it focuses even stronger on resilience and self-awareness. The lines “If a leaf has fallen / Does the tree lie broken?” (“Dusk” 1970) highlight a glass-half-full way of thinking that fits well with Charlie’s recovery. Even though Charlie has experienced profound trauma and loss, the song suggests that going through hardship does not mean that one is fully broken. By the end of the novel, Charlie recognizes that life continues even after bad times: “That was the amazing part. Things just keep going” (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 229). Like the tree that continues to stand, Charlie realizes that his trauma does not have to define him, and that brokenness and strength can coexist.

The song’s lyrics also reflect Charlie’s situation as his friends leave for college, with the line “The captain stands alone” (“Dusk” 1970). However, unlike in the beginning of the novel, Charlie does not see being on his own again as a bad thing and is not afraid of starting another year of high school (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 230–231). Overall, Charlie has a more positive attitude toward the end of the novel, which the lyrics of the song reflect. The song symbolizes Charlie’s growing awareness that he is the one who has control over his life. It also mirrors Charlie’s emotional journey, which shows that there is hope after despair.

The hopeful theme depicted in the previous songs continues in The Beatles’ song “Blackbird” (1968). The line “Take these broken wings and learn to fly” (“Blackbird” 1968) reflects Charlie’s healing journey after it is revealed that he was abused by his aunt. Like the blackbird in the song that must learn to fly again, Charlie must learn to live with this newly discovered part of his past and eventually move on. At the end of the novel, Charlie acknowledges that although people cannot control their past they can still choose how to move forward and learn to live with what has happened (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 228).

Charlie wonders from time to time why he acts in a certain way (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 149). His strange behavior was probably partly caused by the unknown trauma. However, after the trauma is revealed, Charlie eventually seems to feel better. The line “You were only waiting for this moment to be free” (“Blackbird” 1968) could mirror how the revelation has caused his burden to be lifted. Even though the memories about the abuse are painful, it is good that everything is out now. Charlie has a clearer understanding about things and himself, and he can better form his identity. In a way, he is finally free.

Finally, we come to the last song about change and hope. Fleetwood Mac’s “Landslide” (1975) captures Charlie’s fears about change, as well as his acceptance that it is inevitable.

Like the previously mentioned songs, “Landslide” (1975) similarly reflects different moments and emotional challenges Charlie goes through in the novel. The line “Can I sail through the changin’ ocean tides?” (“Landslide” 1975) begs the question whether Charlie can handle all the different emotions that come from his trauma and changes that happen to him. This uncertainty is reflected in the lines “Well, I’ve been ‘fraid of changin’ / ‘Cause I’ve built my life around you” (ibid.) in two different ways. First, Charlie has centered much of the past year around Sam and Patrick, and when they leave for college, Charlie has to find new friends all over again. Second, the lyrics also indicate how it is very difficult to accept this new image of his aunt and change his whole perception about her. Aunt Helen was an extremely important parent figure in Charlie’s life, but now the image has changed. This change is painful, but also necessary for Charlie to understand himself better.

Overall, the song moves toward acceptance rather than despair, which mirrors Charlie’s journey. He acknowledges that he could spend the rest of his life blaming his aunt, and that there could always be someone to blame, but realizes there is no point in that (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 227–228). His ability to adopt this perspective indicates emotional maturity, which can be seen in the lyrics: “But time makes you bolder / Even children get older” (“Landslide” 1975). Charlie realizes that change is unavoidable and growth can come from hardship.

There is also an interesting change between the line in the beginning of the song, “Til the landslide brought me down”, and at the end “Well, the landslide will bring it down” (ibid.) This change could reflect Charlie’s optimistic shift in his mindset. At the beginning of the novel, Charlie views bad times as something looming, and he anticipates a breakdown before anything too bad has even happened (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 78). However, the latter line feels more optimistic in tone, just like Charlie is at the end of the novel, saying: “please believe that things are good with me, and even if they’re not, they will be soon enough” (Chbosky [1999] 2012, 231). A bad thing, like the landslide, does not appear as a threat anymore but as a natural part of life. Charlie accepts that bad times will come, but they are survivable.

Together, these final songs on the mix tape show Charlie’s gradual movement toward healing and a better sense of self. They accompany Charlie as he begins to understand that his past does not define his future and that change is possible. His emotional growth aligns with what Simon Frith argues about the relationship between music and identity. Frith describes that identity is not a fixed state but an ongoing process, “a becoming, not a being”, and that our

experience of music is “best understood as an experience of this *self-in-process*” (Frith [2007] 2016, 294–295). In the beginning of the book, Charlie is a little lost with himself, but eventually his self-image becomes clearer, and music is part of the process that helps him get there. Frith further notes that “music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others” (ibid.). Chbosky has expressed a similar view. In an interview where he talks about the musical references in the book, he explains that when you are young, music becomes part of the identity you are forming, and that certain songs or bands become pieces of this “mosaic” that shapes who you eventually become (Chbosky 2023, 0:43–1:01). For Charlie, the songs on the mix tape become part of this mosaic, and they are a way of understanding himself and his emotions. In this sense, the final songs do not only reflect Charlie’s healing, but they actively participate in it and become part of the person he is trying to be.

## 4 Conclusion

The analysis shows that the thirteen songs on the B side of Charlie's mix tape function as more than cultural references in Stephen Chbosky's *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (1999). They act as intertextual elements that deepen the novel's emotional and narrative layers. Through the songs, Charlie expresses feelings he cannot articulate directly, and the lyrics become a parallel narrative that reflects his life. Intertextuality provides a solid framework to help understand how the songs contribute to the novel. Drawing from Kristeva's and Genette's thoughts on intertextuality, the songs can be seen as additional voices that interact with Charlie's narration, which allows the emotional and thematic resonance in the text to expand.

Frith and DeNora's perspectives help explain why music is such a powerful tool for Charlie that allows him to articulate emotions, revisit memories, and make sense of his experiences. By examining the mix tape as an intertextual device, this thesis highlights how music shapes the novel's portrayal of emotional growth, adolescence, and identity. The songs offer an insight into Charlie's character and reveal how music is a means through which he understands himself and the world around him. The songs do not purely accompany the story, but they help tell it.

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