

Jana Radošinská, Lenka Rusňáková, Zuzana Točená

Biographical Drama Becoming a Blockbuster: The Case Study of Bohemian Rhapsody

Abstract

The study focuses on the biographical drama (or, the biopic) as a critically underestimated, yet popular film genre that tends to portray extraordinary lives and career patterns of famous people. Given the fact that the feature film *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018, directed by Bryan Singer, later Dexter Fletcher) has changed the way we think about the economic and cultural potential of biopics entirely, the authors offer an overview of the current scholarly understanding of biographical films and their preferred means of expression. The main objective of the study is to define *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s narrative structure in light of the conventional genre patterns related to biopics. Acknowledging the movie's unprecedented global success, the authors work with the assumption that as shown by *Bohemian Rhapsody*, certain biographical dramas can, in fact, become globally popular, especially if they are able to communicate celebratory life stories of the admired and famous in a manner that corresponds with their target

audiences' expectations. The assumption is addressed via a theoretical reflection on the given topic and through narrative analysis of the biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody*.

Key words

Biographical drama. Blockbuster. Bohemian Rhapsody. Film genre. Movie narrative.

Introduction

The biographical drama focused on musicians is an audio-visual media product that results from the contemporary movie/music industrial synergy. It needs to be pointed out that practically all feature films of this kind are one-off movies. Such audio-visual works tend to offer more elaborate plotlines and deeper psychological portrayals of their main and supporting characters. This also means they are, naturally, in sharp contrast with most lucrative (and expensive) blockbusters created on the basis of franchise filmmaking. Schatz reminds us that movie franchises, especially those

centred on superheroines and superheroes, we might add, possess a very important feature that used to be typical only for long-running episodic television dramas – the tendency to establish firm emotional ties between their viewers and the emerging storylines¹. In other words, it is unusual if not impossible for most one-off films to establish such a connection with their audiences, biopics being no exception. However, *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018, directed by Bryan Singer, later Dexter Fletcher) made that happen and captivated the viewers' attention so much that Freddie Mercury and Queen's cinematic story may not end when their on-screen counterparts wave their fans goodbye after the band's legendary Live Aid performance.

Another fact to consider is that biopics rarely achieve global success. The more this general

1 SCHATZ, T.: New Hollywood, New Millennium. In BUCKLAND, W. (ed.): *Film Theory and Contemporary Hollywood Movies*. New York, London : Routledge, 2009, pp. 32-33.

rule seems to apply, the more extraordinary *Bohemian Rhapsody* seems to be. The movie was able to present Freddie Mercury's turbulent life and music produced by the world-famous rock band Queen in a manner that appealed not only to younger generations of moviegoers, but also to middle-aged and older audiences. As reported by comScore's exit polling service PostTrak during the first week of the movie's theatrical run, 17% of ticket buyers were aged 18 – 24, while 26% of the audience was between the ages of 25 and 44. Each of the age groups 35 – 44 and 45 – 54 comprised 19% of the audience, which is quite rare to encounter, especially while talking about globalised mainstream cinema. Moreover, moviegoers aged 55 and older (who are generally not too interested in going to the cinema) made up 14% of ticket buyers for *Bohemian Rhapsody*². Considering the film's box office performance and critical reputation (marked by the lead actor Rami Malek's Oscar-worthy portrayal of Freddie Mercury), it is not too surprising to notice the ongoing discussions about a possible sequel³. We might even say that this development is

2 MCCLINTOCK, P.: *Box Office: Ignoring Critics, a Multigenerational Audience Makes 'Bohemian Rhapsody' Rock*. [online]. [2022-02-19]. Available at: <<https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/general-news/bohemian-rhapsody-box-office-fueled-by-young-old-1158012/>>.

3 SIMPSON, G.: *Bohemian Rhapsody 2: Brian May 'Excited' by Freddie Mercury Sequel Ideas 'Very Attractive'*. [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <<https://www.express.co.uk/entertainment/films/1561735/Bohemian-Rhapsody-2-Brian-May-Freddie-Mercury-sequel-plans-Roger-Taylor->>.

rather understandable and quite expected.

As the study's aim is to reflect on the most commercially successful biographical drama ever made, the following theoretical framework offers an overview of the current scholarly discussions concerning the genre and its cultural and economic importance. The theoretical reflection is based on various methods – analysis, synthesis, inductive and deductive reasoning, comparison, giving examples and wider generalisation. Following up on this body of knowledge, the next part of the text offers narrative analysis of the movie *Bohemian Rhapsody*. Our objective is to interpret the ways in which this feature film's producers use genre conventions of the biographical drama in order to make Freddie Mercury's dramatized story more complex, appealing and entertaining to watch.

1 Biographical Dramas in the 21st Century: A Critical Exploration

Any scholarly discussion on biographical dramas necessarily involves the problem of seeing/not seeing this type of movie production as a standalone and full-fledged film genre. However, this question is hard to answer, because, as Neale suggests, the concept of "movie genre" is, in fact, rather a promotional tool utilised by the film industry than a true, well-established taxonomy. According to the author, all contemporary films are multi-generic and multi-

dimensional, which automatically renders the existing genre categories vague and dysfunctional. Genre 'labels' thus mostly give the viewer a clearer idea of what to expect from a movie, outlining its "narrative image"⁴. One way or another, the biographical drama is a specific subtype of the film drama inspired by true events. Bergan states that it is a partly fictitious, dramatized portrait of a famous or otherwise important person. The narrative structure of such a movie is quite conventional. The main protagonist has to overcome many obstacles, risking money, family happiness or their own life in order to succeed. These events are followed by a time period marked by failure, bad luck and conflicts. While facing complications and/or personal tragedies, the hero/ine fights against all odds, eventually performing extraordinary acts. And again, the life phase filled with success is replaced by a time of disappointment and regrets⁵. These 'ups and downs' allow the character to appear as an extraordinary person making the impossible real while struggling to overcome problems experienced by all people, extraordinary or not.

Custen defines the term "biographical film" as a motion picture that "depicts the life of a historical person, past or

4 NEALE, S.: *Genre and Hollywood*. London, New York : Routledge, 2000, p. 39.

5 BERGAN, R.: *Film. Velký ilustrovaný sřievodca*. Bratislava : Slovart, 2008, p. 123.

present". Most movies of this kind are composed of the life (or a portion of the life) of a real person whose real name is used (but not always). The author also outlines the genre's ideological and dramatic patterns. These are often associated with the tensions between the innovative individual (it might be a novel entertainer, a reforming politician or, for example, a ground-breaking scientist) and the established institutions and traditions. Therefore, the protagonist's relationship with the members of a given community is antagonistic. This conflict is marked by the main character's struggle to reformulate the moral, cultural or social boundaries of the given community⁶. Neale remarks that very little has been written on biopics: "This is largely because the biopic has lacked critical - rather than industrial - esteem"⁷. The generally low critical reputation of the genre is also mentioned by Minier and Pennacchia, who argue that many film critics still hesitate to recognise the biographical film as a fully-fledged genre, let alone appreciate it - despite the fact that multiple biopics have achieved both international popularity and numerous accolades⁸. In Hollinger's

words, it is quite paradoxical that biographical films have been both critically neglected and celebrated by the movie industry: "Critics have ridiculed, maligned, and despised biopics, describing them with a wide range of pejorative adjectives such as simplistic, artistically embarrassing, vacuous, formulaic, sentimental, tedious, pedestrian, and even fraudulent." Yet, the industry routinely promotes these feature films as prestige pictures and star vehicles⁹. In other words, biopics might not be as profitable as science-fiction and fantasy blockbusters, but some of them actually are internationally popular.

According to Cheshire, the popularity of biopics is related to the general fascination with the private lives of stars and celebrities. However, the films themselves are condemned by movie critics despite being successful at the box office and on the award circuit, which makes the genre maligned and misunderstood. That is why we need to explore why the biopic is enjoying such a resurgence, who are suitable candidates for biopic treatment, how much of a life should be included in a film to make it a biopic and how to tell such a story, whether the choice of actresses and actors (and their approach to the roles) affects the representation, and what response do these films receive,

critically and commercially¹⁰.

Academic debates on biographical dramas (i.e., biopics) become even more complicated if we consider their gender-related disparities¹¹. Bingham notes that there is a significant ideological difference between biographical dramas portraying women and those depicting men: "Films about men have gone from celebratory to warts-and-all to investigatory to postmodern and parodic. Biopics of women, on the other hand, are weighed down by myths of suffering, victimisation, and failure perpetuated by a culture whose films reveal an acute fear of women in the public realm. Female biopics can be made empowering only by a conscious and deliberate application of a feminist point of view." Celebratory biopics tend to depict the great man and function as an ode to the person's accomplishments and extraordinary nature, while the warts-and-all concept focuses on psychological problems of the protagonists intertwining with their accomplishments. Following the cult pseudo-biopic *Citizen Kane* (1941, directed by Orson Welles), investigatory biopics often unveil or explain mysteries tied to a person's public or personal life. Postmodern

biopics utilise complex, fragmented narrative structures, complicating the biopic form. Parodic biopics question, even mock the very nature of the genre¹². Considering this categorisation, we may define *Bohemian Rhapsody* as a fitting example of the celebratory biopic. In contrast, the warts-and-all concept is utilised in *The Dirt* (2019, directed by Jeff Tremaine) which portrays the 'ups and downs' of the notorious rock band Mötley Crüe. The 2005 quasi-biopic *Last Days* (directed by Gus van Sant) uses the investigatory approach to depict a partly fictitious dramatization of the circumstances of Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994. Being markedly different from most biographical dramas, Todd Haynes's film *I'm Not There* (2007) portrays the musician Bob Dylan in an unconventional and distinctively postmodern manner, through six different character incarnations, one of them performed by the Australian actress Cate Blanchett. The essence of parodic biopics can be seen in *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story* (2007, directed by Jake Kasdan). The movie indirectly and playfully refers to biopics about musicians by portraying a fictitious music star and paying tribute to various music legends, e.g., Elvis Presley and The Beatles.

Repeatedly mentioning Custen's

renowned work on the genre of biographical drama, Neale remarks that when biopics start *in medias res* rather than during the portrayed person's childhood, the films focus on the individual being an autonomous agent. That is why the role of their family tends to be downplayed or displaced. In contrast, films that portray the early years of a famous person often emphasise the family's role¹³. Vidal sees the genre as a personalised mode of history-telling, which connects cinema to 19th-century literary models. As the author suggests, biopics rely on linearity and an accumulation of facts in order to provide a strong logical thread and a sense of progress. An account of a person's life is necessarily selective, constructed through the framing structure of flashbacks, linearity and factuality¹⁴. According to Custen, biographical dramas tend to involve specific montage sequences. These sequences are often used to underline the depicted person's greatness and the extent of their fame. Such movie sequences include rapidly shifting headlines, record labels, posters or charts showing exceptional sales or box office performances. Trial scenes and their analogues are quite common as well, functioning as

markers of both public recognition and public judgement¹⁵. In the case of *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a trial-like scene is depicted as a press conference during which Freddie Mercury and other Queen members face the paparazzi and other tabloid journalists; a fictional female journalist named Shelley Stern openly questions Mercury's lifestyle and uses a series of tasteless remarks to provoke him in order to make him reveal details about his unacknowledged homosexual orientation. Thus, the depicted group of journalists verbally attacking Mercury acts as a narrative device representing the self-righteous moral judgement of the conservative public.

2 Objectives and Methods

Considering the aforementioned theoretical framework of the analysis, the main objective of the analysis is to identify the ways in which *Bohemian Rhapsody* utilises genre conventions of the biopic in order to present Freddie Mercury's life as an emotionally engaging story that celebrates his showmanship and unique personality. Thus, the analysis identifies the narrative structure of the analysed biographical drama in order to better understand its specific genre traits which possibly differentiate it from other biopics centred on musicians or other celebrities. Given

6 CUSTEN, G. F.: *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 1992, pp. 5-7, 72.

7 NEALE, S.: *Genre and Hollywood*. London, New York : Routledge, 2000, p. 54.

8 MINIER, M., PENNACCHIA, M.: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Biopic: An Introduction. In MINIER, M., PENNACCHIA, M. (eds.): *Adaptation, Intermediality and the British Celebrity Biopic*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge,

2016, p. 2.

9 HOLLINGER, K.: *Biopics of Women*. Abingdon, New York : Routledge, 2020, pp. 5-8.

10 CHESHIRE, E.: *Bio-Pics: A Life in Pictures*. London, New York : Wallflower, 2015, pp. 3-4.

11 FARKAŠ, T.: Binaural and Ambisonic Sound as the Future Standard of Digital Games. In *Acta Ludologica*, 2018, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 34-46.

12 BINGHAM, D.: *Whose Lives Are They Anyway? The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre*. New Brunswick, London : Rutgers University Press, 2010, pp. 10, 17-18.

13 NEALE, S.: *Genre and Hollywood*. London, New York : Routledge, 2000, p. 56.

14 VIDAL, B.: Introduction: The Biopic and Its Critical Contexts. In BROWN, T., VIDAL, B. (eds.): *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2014, p. 5.

15 CUSTEN, G. F.: *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 1992, p. 136, 185.

the context of the following analysis, we pose the following research question referring to the empirical objective as defined above:

RQ1: *What kind of narrative structure is present in Bohemian Rhapsody, considering the common genre conventions of biographical dramas?*

The subsequent empirical reflection is based on the principles of narrative analysis. We are especially interested in *Bohemian Rhapsody's* genre structure and narrative. According to Rusňáková, qualitative content analysis of this kind aims to reflect on a media product's structure and its ability to convincingly communicate thematic, compositional and formal traits similar to (or identical with) those constituting other media products belonging to the same genre category¹⁶. In Hayward's words, the term "narrative" refers to the strategies, codes and conventions (including *mise-en-scène*) employed to organise a (film) story. Thus, these strategies are used as a means of reproducing the 'real' world, one which the spectator can identify with¹⁷. Even though the biographical drama, as a genre, is rarely associated with compelling and original storytelling and exceptional aesthetics, we believe that *Bohemian*

Rhapsody is, despite its rather conventional narrative structure, unique thanks to its complex and emotionally engaging portrayal of Freddie Mercury and the people and environment surrounding him during his artistic career.

3 Results

The biographical drama *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018, directed by Bryan Singer, later replaced by Dexter Fletcher) is the most commercially successful biopic ever made, since the movie grossed 910 million American dollars at the worldwide box office¹⁸. These numbers make *Bohemian Rhapsody* the sixth most successful motion picture released in 2018 and the only one-off feature film included in the top 10 of the 2018 worldwide box office. The movie's ability to compete against several well-established science-fiction and action-adventure franchises or long-running series (such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, the DC Extended Universe or the Wizarding Worlds) is beyond remarkable. However, it is even more important to note that *Bohemian Rhapsody* ranks 62th amongst the most successful feature films of all time, being significantly more profitable than, for example, Johnny Cash's life story depicted in *Walk the Line* (2005, directed by James Mangold), the cinematic portrait of the beginnings of

the rap group NWA in *Straight Outta Compton* (2015, directed by F. Gary Gray) or Elton John's biopic *Rocketman* (2019, directed by Dexter Fletcher)¹⁹, its direct competitor with a markedly similar narrative structure.

Bohemian Rhapsody's narrative structure is built in accordance with Bergan's definition of the biographical drama as a specific type of film drama²⁰. The dramatic structure is based on the three-act narrative model. The first act (i.e., the Set-up) shows that Freddie Mercury (Rami Malek) has to overcome a series of obstacles to become an inimitable lead singer of one of the most successful rock bands of all time. These complications include the moments when we see him working at Heathrow as a baggage handler, loading and unloading luggage while facing his colleagues' contempt and racist insults. Moreover, Smile, the promising band Farrokh/Freddie has been following for a while, first represented by the founding members Brian May (Gwilym Lee) and Roger Taylor (Ben Hardy), questions its future existence as Tim Staffel, the former lead singer, plans to join a different group with a (seemingly) higher

commercial potential. Nevertheless, when meeting Freddie Bulsara, May and Taylor immediately recognise his talent. Smile's journey towards fame and success is also outlined by the presence of John Deacon (Joseph Mazzello), the band's new bass player. The first act of the movie thus depicts Smile/Queen's rise to fame. Bulsara/Mercury, May, Taylor and Deacon risk their hard-earned savings and sell their panel van to be able to record a demo. However, this gamble is beyond successful. Queen members meet the renowned manager John Reid (Aidan Gillen), experience their first television appearances, tour across different continents and produce some of their most popular songs. Moreover, Freddie falls in love with Mary Austin (Lucy Boynton), seeing her as "*the love of his life*". However, the tensions start to build up along the way, as noted by Custen²¹. Mercury, a one-of-a-kind performer, argues with his family (facing his father's disapproval), which results in long-term disruption of his already fragile family ties. Thus, the conflict between the extraordinary individual (Mercury) and his family (the Bulsaras) foreshadows Freddie's revolt against the established traditions respected by his modest, deeply religious relatives.

According to Neale, if biopics start *in medias res* (like in this case), the viewer cannot expect a deeper

portrayal of the main protagonist's childhood and upbringing²². The role of Mercury's family is obviously downplayed, even though *Bohemian Rhapsody* includes an essential scene showing Mercury's small birthday party attended by his closest family, May, Taylor, Deacon and their girlfriends, Mary and her father. It is obvious that this kind of small-scale celebration does not correspond with Freddie's personality and expectations, especially due to the fact that his parents share some (rather embarrassing) childhood stories and photographs with the other people around the table. Mercury's carefully fabricated story about being a trueborn Londoner is thus disrupted. This moment (partly) results in his decision to isolate himself from his family. Queen seemingly become his 'true' kin, understanding his talents and personality. This idea of a 'substitute family' consisting of strong individuals, yet inseparable friends (spectacularly depicted by the sequence showing Queen recording the song *Bohemian Rhapsody* at the Rockfield studio) is, however, disrupted as well.

In fact, Mercury has at least one more important reason why he 'abandons' his parents and sister like this – his chaotic lifestyle, which is presented in the second act (the Confrontation) is marked by promiscuous behaviour, binge-drinking and ostentatious

house parties involving drug use. The toxic influence of his manager and lover Paul Prenter (Allen Leech) strongly impacts the relationships inside the band; it is obvious that Prenter would like to assume full control of Mercury's career and personal life and he succeeds in doing so, although only for a while. This rather short period of time involves many different losses and missteps. Mercury claims to be bored and exhausted by the band's endless circle of recording new songs, arguing over whose songs will be released and touring all over the world. Leaving his 'true family' behind, the singer experiences regret, disappointment and loneliness resulting from Prenter's disloyalty and manipulative behaviour. Mercury's worsening health condition and mental state prevent him from working like he used to work with Queen and his singing performances are far from convincing. Following the conventions of biopics outlined by Vidal²³, the movie's creators portray these events selectively, applying a substantial degree of simplification and idealisation. Finding out that he is HIV-positive, Mercury reevaluates most of his previous decisions and choices. The third act (the Resolution) shows him as a self-aware, determined and courageous person doing anything that needs to be done to return

16 RUSŇÁKOVÁ, L.: Naratívna analýza a jej miesto vo vedeckom diskurze mediálnych štúdií. In RADOŠINSKÁ, J. et al.: *Empirické aspekty filmov o superhrdinoch*. Trnava : FMK UCM, 2019, p. 59.

17 HAYWARD, S.: *Cinema Studies: Key Concepts*. London, New York : Routledge, 2000, p. 256.

18 *Bohemian Rhapsody* (2018). [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/title/tt1727824/?ref=bo_se_r_1>.

19 FUSTER, J.: 11 Highest-Grossing Music Biopics, from Tupac's 'All Eyez on Me' to Elton John's 'Rocketman'. *Far and Away, 'Bohemian Rhapsody' Is King*. [online]. [2022-02-12]. Available at: <https://www.thewrap.com/music-biopics-top-gross-tupac-bohemian-rhapsody-rocketman/>.

20 BERGAN, R.: *Film. Veľký ilustrovaný sprievodca*. Bratislava : Slovart, 2008, p. 123.

21 CUSTEN, G. F.: *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History*. New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 1992, pp. 5-7, 72.

22 NEALE, S.: *Genre and Hollywood*. London, New York : Routledge, 2000, p. 56.

23 VIDAL, B.: Introduction: The Biopic and Its Critical Contexts. In BROWN, T., VIDAL, B. (eds.): *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture*. New York, Abingdon : Routledge, 2014, p. 5.

to both his families – Queen and the Bulsaras. Mercury's terminal diagnosis comes to light shortly after he is deceived and betrayed by Prenter who later uses their professional separation and break-up to his own advantage, attending TV discussions and sharing intimate (and partly untrue) information about Freddie with the whole world. Finding out that there is a large musical event to attend, Mercury tentatively contacts Queen's manager Jim 'Miami' Beach (Tom Hollander) to "connect with the mothership". Apologising for his previous behaviour and complying with the band's reasonable terms, Freddie sees the upcoming Live Aid performance as the highlight of his career, as the last opportunity to truly shine before falling seriously ill and dying of AIDS (Figure 1). Mercury's extensive preparations for the event include a series of cathartic moments such as letting Jim Hutton (Aaron McCusker) know how he feels about him and coming out in the presence of the Bulsaras by introducing Jim as his partner. The celebratory nature of the movie is best experienced during the concluding part of the film, i.e., Queen's Live Aid performance that is stylised as a full-scale musical spectacle filled with emotions and energy.



Figure 1: Freddie Mercury preparing for Queen's Live Aid performance

Source: WILLIAMS, O.: *Bohemian Rhapsody. Ze zákulisí filmového megahitu. Oficiální kniha k filmu*. Brno : Jota, 2019, p. 116.

As noted by Plencner, Kralovičová and Stropko, visual and narrative functions of feature films are not limited to their aesthetic frameworks. Any movie narrative – especially one associated with portraying a famous person's life and work, we might add – thus has to comprise elements of everyday life and 'ordinary' struggles the audiences are able to relate to. These aspects might be defined as "social meanings". Filmmakers tend to use them to emphasise the authenticity of their motion pictures. Some of the most prominent social meanings included in mainstream cinema are confronting one's own 'dark side', irrational or supernatural forces, longing for love, desire for justice/desire for revenge, 'the revolt of Prometheus', struggle with nature, the need for self-actualisation, the need to be appreciated by the others, the motive of conspiracy and the theme of becoming a saviour

and/or scapegoat²⁴. *Bohemian Rhapsody* does not include any fight between good and evil in the traditional sense; the motive is replaced by the main character's constant need for external appreciation and his desire for love. Mercury primarily longs to become a world-class performer, quickly establishing himself as a prominent rock musician. In the meantime, however, he struggles with his own 'dark side', as he keeps hiding and denying his homosexual orientation for a long time. This (initially just intrinsic) conflict only becomes worse and worse as Mercury seeks one-night stands, organises parties involving alcohol and drug use, or expresses his megalomania (the ostentatious mansion where each of Mercury's cats has its own bedroom). The hero's conflict with the other members of the band, which occurs in the second act of the film, is, in a way, 'the revolt of Prometheus'. Freddie Mercury indefinitely leaves Queen, his 'family', to fulfil his own ambitions. Throughout the whole story, Mercury's desire for love can be observed – first he seeks mutual trust and intimacy with Mary Austin, his fiancée, and later conducts a long-time search for the waiter Jim Hutton, whom he is attracted to. The motive of conspiracy is indirectly represented by Mercury's former

²⁴ PLENCNER A., KRALOVIČOVÁ D., STROPKO M.: Hero Transformations in Contemporary Mainstream Film. In *European Journal of Science and Theology*, 2014, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 82-83.

partner and manager Paul Prenter. Prenter pretends to be Freddie's confidant, but he, in fact, sabotages his career and almost destroys his social relationships. At the end of the story, trying to fulfil his need for self-actualisation, Mercury visits his parents with his new life partner Jim – a man – and openly asks for their understanding. Thus, a diverse set of social meanings is used to deepen the emotional impact of the movie.

Discussion and Conclusion

Bohemian Rhapsody is a celebratory biographical drama, which is also underlined by its key idea 'Fearless Lives Forever'. This motto loosely associates immortality with not being afraid to show who you truly are and is used repeatedly during the movie's promotional campaign. *Bohemian Rhapsody's* message is related to Freddie Mercury's turbulent life and career; it is a story of a musician who does not and cannot 'fit in', hence his unique mentality, controversial public appearances and unconventional looks combined with extravagant fashion choices. Therefore, Mercury's explicit refusal to comply with the existing social conventions functions as a source of most conflicts included in the film. However, the audience's attention is centred on Queen/Mercury's music, energy, camaraderie and all the things that help Freddie Mercury, Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon realise that when sticking together, they are much stronger and successful

despite their numerous character differences and contradictory opinions. Mercury's 'second family' is presented much more extensively than his real one; the second act of the movie mentions the Bulsaras only minimally, mostly during Queen's press conference when Freddie loses his nerves and falsely claims that his parents and sister "died in a fiery wreck". However, his father's life motto "good thoughts, good words, good deeds" is used repeatedly to deepen Mercury's inner transformation and reconciliation with both the Bulsaras and his own true nature.

The most elementary function of the analysed biographical drama is to provide its audience with an emotionally engaging portrayal of a performer whose music remains unique even in the 21st century, more than three decades after his untimely passing. Refreshing the context in which Queen's music was created and offering both highly engaging visuals and refined sound effects, the movie re-creates the band's most famous performances and merges them with new ones, using the music to drive the narrative. The film's genre structure prioritises essential and universal human values such as love, friendship and family. Secondary characters (above all, Brian May, Roger Taylor and John Deacon) are depicted in a manner that stresses the true value of having a family to rely on. The biopic thus communicates the idea that family ties and bonds forged by shared love for music (and then tested

during personal or professional crises) are truly unbreakable. Many musical performances included in the movie follow the same formula – the band members are first shown while creating and recording a song and the song itself then provides a smooth audio-visual transition towards a spectacular on-stage interpretation of the same musical work. Ironically enough, the story itself might claim that genre formulas do not lead to making one's music either innovative or outstanding, but they actually do fulfil their purpose in terms of the movie's narrative structure.

The movie's editing, atmosphere, general setting and narrative are all elaborated to correspond with carefully picked Queen's songs (especially their lyrics) which do not just accompany the individual scenes, but rather shape them, 'tell' what is happening and establish *Bohemian Rhapsody's* lively flow and emotional impact. As it seems, this utilisation of music is an essential precondition of offering dynamic visuals expected and favoured by today's movie audiences²⁵. On the other hand, the manner in which Freddie Mercury's life is depicted is inevitably selective. The movie is based on real historical facts and/or events, but even though our objective was not to assess the extent to which it corresponds with reality, we have to observe that it is far from accurate.

²⁵ See, for example: ŠEVČOVIČ, M.: *Princípa grafického média v tvorbe slovenských autorov*. Bratislava : Comenius University, 2021.

Considering its worldwide box office performance, it is appropriate to define *Bohemian Rhapsody* as the only biographical drama to date that was able to become a blockbuster. As we believe, the movie's success was, of course, largely due to Queen's worldwide popularity. However, other marketing and technical details played an important role as well, especially the fact that the movie's theatrical run included projections in IMAX, Dolby and Screen X formats, which strengthened its spectacular, 'blockbuster-like' visual aesthetics²⁶. Given that, this extraordinary display of the cinema/music creative and economic synergy might be just an exceptional case of truly understanding where these media industries meet and merge, but maybe even a convincing model of the biographical drama of the 21st century.

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²⁶ See: HALAMA, L., HUDÍKOVÁ, Z.: Concept of the Camera at the Analogue-Digital Crossroads. In *European Journal of Media, Art & Photography*, 2021, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 70-81; PRAVDOVÁ, H., HUDÍKOVÁ, Z.: Correlations of Culture, Game Principles and Media Productions. In *Communication Today*, 2021, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 4-19.

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Authors

Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Jana Radošinská, PhD.
jana.radosinska@ucm.sk

Mgr. Lenka Rusňáková, PhD.
lenka.rusnakova@ucm.sk

Mgr. Zuzana Točená
tocena1@ucm.sk

Faculty of Mass Media
Communication
University of Ss. Cyril and
Methodius in Trnava
Námestie J. Herdu 2
91701 Trnava
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Profiles of the Authors

Jana Radošinská is affiliated with the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. Her scientific and research specialisation is based on critical analysis of media culture. She is interested in mainstream filmmaking, the terminological axis of media and communication studies, problems of the culture and entertainment industry, as well as perspectives of understanding media audiences and digital games.

Lenka Rusňáková works at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. She deals with new trends in multimedia production and media philosophy. Her scientific specialisation also includes the culture of digital games, the processes of identity formation in the virtual environment and the narratological frameworks of digital media, especially film works, music videos and digital games. She is also interested in issues of feminism in the sphere of media production, but also in heroism in the context of media culture.

Zuzana Točená is a full-time PhD. student at the Faculty of Mass Media Communication of the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia. She is interested in film and episodic production in the context of so-called Internet-distributed television. In her scientific work

to date, she has dealt with the original programming of the media companies *Home Box Office* and *Netflix*, focusing on the narrative, thematic and sociocultural aspects of various works produced by the named companies. She has practical experience acquired in the field of television production.