ILN JOURNAL:
INDIAN LITERARY NARRATIVES

https://doi.org/10.70396/ilnjournal.v3n2.a.07 | Volume 3, Issue 2, June 2026 | ISSN: 3048 6920

Who Never Said "Let It Be": Music, Irony, and the Maternal Counter-Text in Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*

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Abstract

Arundhati Roy's debut memoir Mother Mary Comes to Me (2025) takes its title from "Let It Be," the Beatles' canonical hymn to consolation and surrender. Yet the memoir itself is an act of sustained refusal. Neither Roy nor her mother Mary ever let anything be. This paper argues that Roy deploys "Let It Be" as a deliberate ironic counter-text. This irony is structural. It organises the memoir's narrative of self-formation and artistic becoming. The argument draws on the theory of the grain of the voice by Roland Barthes, the framework of musical meaning in literary texts by Lawrence Kramer, and the distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic by Julia Kristeva. The paper reads Roy's sonic autobiography and her recurring invocations of the Beatles, Janis Joplin, and Jimi Hendrix as a grammar of resistance. In the context of 1970s postcolonial India, Western popular music functioned for Roy as a third space in Homi Bhabha's sense: a site where a young woman from Kerala could imagine a self-exceeding the demands of caste and the formidable mother who was simultaneously her shelter and her storm. To read Mother Mary Comes to Me through the lens of music-literature theory is to recover a dimension of the text that conventional memoir criticism has not yet addressed. Roy's memoir is, at its deepest level, a score written against a song she could never stop hearing.

Keywords: sonic autobiography, musical hermeneutics, mother-daughter narrative, Indian women's life-writing, postcolonial selfhood.

Submitted: 19.04.2026 Revised: 09.05.2026 Accepted: 18.06.2026 Published: 30.06.2026

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Introduction

Mother Mary Comes to Me traces the arc of Arundhati Roy's formation from a vulnerable childhood and restless youth to her emergence as one of India's most significant literary voices. Each phase of this journey is inseparable from the weight of her relationship with her mother, Mary Roy. Mary Roy is a woman of formidable strength. She is a matriarch who stacked her existence on the pursuit of education and built an institution from that belief. Yet her remarkable public self exists in stark tension with her private failures as a mother. Mary Roy is portrayed as deeply contradictory far from the idealised maternal figure that cultural narratives have long promoted. She is capable of cruelty and a kind of damage that leaves lasting marks on her daughter. The mother functions throughout the memoir as a structuring presence, an undercurrent beneath every significant event in Roy's life, including her literary achievements and her romantic attachments. The self that Roy has constructed as a writer and as a public figure is shaped by what her mother made her feel. The memoir's emotional core resides in precisely this irresolvable tension. Roy is a daughter who cannot forgive her mother and cannot stop loving her, for the simple and devastating reason that the mother is irreplaceable.

In September 2022, Arundhati Roy's mother Mary died. Roy tells us that the grief she experienced was not what she had expected not the measured and coherent grief consistent with the complicated distance she had maintained from her mother for decades. Dharmendra Kumar Singh observes in his review of the memoir:

> *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, her memoir, is circular. It starts when life stops,when the mother is dead, and it stops where life starts, where she recalls the departed soul of whom she is to pass her rest life. The whole text is haunted by the shadow of the same loss. But this is not the festooned fashion of the book, it is completely naked. (Singh 2)

It was something rawer and more disorienting: a heart-smashing, as she calls it, that puzzled and shamed her in equal measure. To make sense of it, she began to write. The result is *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025), Roy's first memoir and, by any measure, her most personally exposed work.

The memoir's title arrives before any of this, hovering over the text as both orientation and provocation. Paul McCartney in "Let It Be" (1970) sings "Mother Mary comes to me, speaking words of wisdom: let it be" (Beatles 0.12-0.24). The line invokes a consoling and stilling maternal apparition, counselling acceptance and asking the grieving and the restless to release their grip on what cannot be changed. It is almost perfectly contrary to everything Arundhati Roy has ever done or been. The memoir's dedication makes the same claim about Mary Roy herself: "For Mary Roy, Who never said Let It Be" (Roy i). Mother and daughter are bound together in the dedication by their shared refusal of the song's wisdom. The title, then, is the song's ironic antagonist: not an echo of the song but a refutation of it.

This article takes that irony seriously as a literary and theoretical proposition. It argues that Roy's deployment of "Let It Be" is a structural principle. The song functions throughout the memoir as a counter-text a philosophy of surrender against which Roy's narrative of self-formation is constructed. To read the memoir this way is to recognise it as something that conventional autobiography criticism has not yet named. It is a sonic autobiography, in which music organises memory and gives it its emotional and argumentative shape. The Beatles, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix: they are, as this paper will show, the grammar of her becoming.

To make this argument, the article draws on three theoretical frameworks. Roland Barthes' concept of the grain of the voice the quality in a sung or spoken voice that exceeds meaning and touches the body offers a way of understanding how music functions in Roy's text at a level beneath the semantic. Lawrence Kramer's framework of musical hermeneutics insists on the capacity of music to carry and transform cultural meaning when it enters literary narrative, and provides the tools for a close reading of Roy's specific sonic references. Homi Bhabha's notion of the third space appears briefly to contextualise what it meant, historically and politically, for a young woman in postcolonial Kerala to construct her inner life through Western popular music that is, to find in the Beatles a site of self-invention.

The memoir has received wide and warm critical attention since its publication, winning the 2025 National Book Critics Circle Award and appearing on the New York Times list of the ten best books of 2025. Yet existing reviews, however perceptive, have largely approached it through the lens of biography or political commentary on Roy's activism. The sonic dimension of the text its music and its ironic title has not been the subject of sustained literary theoretical analysis. This paper attempts to fill that gap, and in doing so to demonstrate that *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is a text that thinks seriously, if obliquely, about what music does to a life and how it shapes identity and makes resistance inevitable.

The contours of this reception are worth describing in more detail. Amit Chaudhuri, writing in *The Guardian*, praised the memoir as a brave and absorbing piece of life-writing, while Alexandra Jacobs in *The New York Times* and John Reed in the *Financial Times* concentrated on the figure of Mary Roy herself and on the long shadow, she casts over her daughter's public life (Chaudhuri; Jacobs; Reed). These responses confirm the power of the memoir's central portrait, but they also show the limits of reading the book chiefly as biography. The reviewers treat the music in the text as decoration: a period detail of a 1970s adolescence rather than a structural element of the work. The present paper argues, against this tendency, that the music is the structure.

The memoir also needs to be placed within the longer history of Roy scholarship. Critical work on Roy has, for understandable reasons, centred on *The God of Small Things* (1997) and on her political essays. Early collections such as R. K. Dhawan's *Arundhati Roy: The Novelist Extraordinary* established the novel as the primary object of academic attention, and later studies such as Alex Tickell's guide

to the novel consolidated this focus (Dhawan; Tickell). *Mother Mary Comes to Me* unsettles this critical settlement. It reveals how much of the novel's material the Syrian Christian milieu of Kerala, the powerful and damaged mother, the children caught in her orbit was drawn from the life the memoir now narrates directly. A full account of the memoir's place in Roy's body of work is beyond the scope of this paper, but the sonic reading offered here suggests one starting point: the ear, as much as the eye, connects the memoirist to the novelist.

The Beatles in Roy's India

To understand why the Beatles matter in *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, it is necessary to understand what the Beatles meant in India and specifically what they meant to a young woman growing up in Kerala in the 1960s and 1970s a woman navigating the competing pressures of Syrian Christian domesticity, a mother of terrifying ambition, and her own gathering sense that she was not going to live the life that had been prepared for her. The Beatles were, as Roy makes clear, a form of orientation. They were a way of pointing herself toward a world elsewhere. Karla Zapalac describes how the Beatles arrived in India:

The Beatles arrived in India with a particular double charge. After the Maharishi's invitation, the Beatles went to Rishikesh to practice meditation and work on their spirituality, as well as songwriting. George Harrison said in The Beatles Anthology:

> Each year, Maharishi had a course for Westerners who wanted to become Transcendental Meditation instructors. Although I wasn't going to become an instructor, I wanted to go and have a heavy dose of meditation. John came, and Paul came after him, and then Richard followed with fifteen Sherpas carrying Heinz baked beans. (Zapalac 8)

On one hand, their 1968 visit to Rishikesh to study Transcendental Meditation with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi had made them, paradoxically, figures of Indian cultural prestige in Western eyes a reversal of the usual colonial flow of influence. On the other hand, for young Indians of Roy's generation, particularly those in provincial or semi-urban settings, the Beatles represented something emphatically not Indian: a freedom of sound and self-expression that the structures of family and gender did not permit. To love the Beatles in Kerala in 1970 was to perform, however privately, a small act of cultural refusal.

It is in this light that Homi Bhabha's concept of the third space becomes useful:

> Bhabha (1994) conceptualizes the third space of enunciation in coloniality and postcoloniality in a political discourse of in-betweenness and hybridity. He scrutinizes a formation of hybrid cultural identity of colonized people in their cultural encounter in colonial domination and inequality. For him, hybridity is the process by which the colonial power attempts to transform the identity of the colonized people within a uniform global framework, producing something recognizable and new. (Papastergiadis 257)

For Bhabha, cultural hybridity opens a third space of enunciation. It is a site where meaning is neither purely of the coloniser nor of the colonised but something new and generative. Roy's relationship to the Beatles is precisely this kind of hybridity. She inhabits the gap between the two using the music as a space in which to imagine and rehearse a self. In one of the lines from the memoir, she identifies a man: "He looked like Eric Clapton wearing John Lennon's glasses" (Roy 122). The Western musicians are so deeply internalised that they become the perceptual grid through which Roy reads people. The Beatles, in Roy's hands, are a technology of self-invention.

This dynamic is most visible in the memoir's account of "She's Leaving Home" She says, "For the rest of the summer break, like millions of others in troubled homes, I listened to the Beatles' 'She's Leaving Home' on a loop . . . And Mrs Roy was nothing like the clueless parents in that Beatles song" (Roy 99). Roy listened to this song about a young woman slipping out of her parents' house before dawn, leaving only a note on repeat in the period when she was deciding not to return to Kerala. "She's Leaving Home" is itself a song about the gap between generations, about a daughter's need for something her parents cannot name or provide. McCartney and Lennon give the parents' bewildered lament equal space: "We gave her everything money could buy" (Beatles 1.01-1.07). The song holds both the daughter's freedom and the parents' grief, unresolved. That Roy chose this particular song as the soundtrack of her departure suggests she was hearing both sides of it simultaneously. The music gave her a form for an experience that was too large and too contradictory for words.

The other Beatles references in the memoir extend and complicate this picture. One such reference is a friend's gift of the colour negatives of *Yellow Submarine* (1968). In December 1980, a few months away from submitting her thesis, Roy received from Carlo a set of large square-format colour negatives of the Beatles animated film Yellow Submarine (Roy 105). It is the animated film that transforms the Beatles' music into a riot of visual surrealism and utopian playfulness. The film is a world made entirely of imagination and music, a world in which the enemy is the Blue Meanies who drain colour from everything they touch. That Roy receives it as a gift and positions it in the memoir as a talisman of possibility is significant. Pradip Krishen, the man she describes as the love of her life, is identified in part by the fact that "he knew the Beatles backwards" (Roy 133). Musical knowledge, here, becomes a marker of a particular kind of mind that is curious and alive to culture as a form of play and freedom. To know the Beatles backwards is to have done with music what Roy was doing with architecture, with writing, with life itself. She took them apart to understand how they worked.

Alongside the Beatles, Roy invokes Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix: "Everything – music, fashion, cinema - arrived a few years late. I heard Joe Cocker and Jimi Hendrix. And Janis Joplin. After that everything changed. I longed for bell-bottoms and headbands and beads and rock 'n' roll" (Roy 64). These are figures whose relationship to their own voices and bodies was one of radical expenditure, of giving

everything in the act of performance, of refusing the economies of restraint. They form, together with the Beatles, a sonic counter-tradition against which Roy measured herself artists who pushed at the limits of what a voice and a life could do in the context of a memoir about a mother who was herself a force of nature, who founded a school and raised her children with an intensity that bordered on violence. These musical choices reveal something about the inheritance Roy is tracing. Mary Roy, too, never let it be. The music Roy loved was, perhaps, the nearest cultural equivalent she could find to what her mother was.

The postcolonial stakes of this musical self-fashioning can be sharpened with two further reference points. Frantz Fanon argued that to speak the coloniser's language is to take on a world and a culture, so that the inner life of the colonised subject is never simply her own (Fanon 38). Gayatri Spivak's famous question about whether the subaltern can speak raises a parallel doubt: can self-expression borrowed from the imperial centre ever articulate the experience of the margin (Spivak 287). Roy's memoir does not resolve these doubts so much as live inside them. Her English, her Beatles, her Joplin are all imported materials, and the self she built from them is, in Fanon's sense, partly a colonial inheritance. Yet the memoir also shows these materials being turned to local and rebellious purposes: against the patriarchy of the Syrian Christian church, against the expectations placed on a Kerala daughter, and at times against the mother herself. The third space, in other words, is not a comfortable position but a contested one, and Roy's sonic life records both its freedoms and its costs.

It is here that the postcolonial dimension of Roy's sonic autobiography opens onto something more intimate and more theoretically complex. The Western popular music Roy embraced was, in ways she may not have fully articulated to herself at the time, a mirror in which she could see reflected the very qualities she most feared and most admired in her mother: the refusal of restraint and the willingness to burn brightly at whatever cost. To understand this is to begin to see why the memoir's title is dialectical and why, as the following sections will argue, the figure of "Let It Be"organises the text at a level far deeper than its surface provocation.

"Let It Be" as Ironic Title

The title of a memoir is the first interpretive act the writer performs on her own material. Arundhati Roy chose to title her memoir after a line from a Beatles song whose central counsel is surrender. The dedication makes the irony explicit before the memoir has properly begun. "For Mary Roy-Who never said Let It Be" (Roy). Roy says, specifically, that Mary never said *Let It Be*. The dedication thus establishes a triangular relationship that will govern the entire memoir: Arundhati, Mary, and the song. The song is the third term the absent philosophy against which both women are measured and against which both women push back.

Roland Barthes' concept of the grain of the voice offers a productive way of understanding what Roy is doing with "Let It Be" at this level of the text. For Barthes, "The grain is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb

as it performs" (Barthes 188). This is that quality in a voice, whether sung or spoken, that exceeds semantic meaning and operates directly on the body of the listener. It is the materiality of the voice flesh and resonance that cannot be reduced to what the voice is saying. Barthes distinguishes between singers who perform the meaning of a song and singers who embody something in excess of that meaning, whose voice carries a remainder that interpretation cannot fully absorb. The former illustrates a song's content and renders its emotion legible. McCartney's voice in "Let It Be" is, in Barthes' terms, a voice of extraordinary grain. It is warm and consoling at the level of sound itself, independently of the words it carries.

This dialectical quality connects to what Lawrence Kramer calls the hermeneutic window those moments in a literary text where music enters and opens an interpretive gap, a space of meaning that the text's own language cannot close. For Kramer, "Musical meaning, even when focused by a text or program, is always non-predicative and inexact. Its connotations are peripheral, always somewhat displaced not so much vague as unlocalized, at a third remove, like a name on the tip of the tongue" (Kramer 6). This explains why Roy reaches for songs rather than words at threshold moments: music holds what language cannot yet name, exceeding what the writer explicitly says. "Let It Be" is an exceptionally rich hermeneutic window in this sense. It carries into the memoir its entire cultural weight, including its origins in McCartney's dream of his own dead mother and its quality of being a farewell dressed as a consolation. Roy may or may not intend all of these resonances, but Kramer's framework insists that they are present in the text regardless for to name "Let It Be" is to open the memoir to everything the song is and has been.

The fact that "Let It Be" was itself written in grief is important. McCartney has said the song came to him in a dream in which his mother Mary, who died of cancer when he was fourteen, appeared and told him everything would be all right. This knowledge gives the memoir's title a vertiginous layer. Roy's Mary and McCartney's Mary are two dead mothers of the same name who produced two very different conclusions. McCartney's Mary counselled peace; Roy's Mary, as the dedication insists, never would. The song about a dead mother named Mary offering consolation was written by someone whose mother, unlike Roy's, was capable of offering it.

Julia Kristeva's distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic becomes most useful at exactly this point. For Kristeva, the symbolic is the realm of grammar, law, and stable meaning, while the semiotic is the realm of rhythm, tone, and bodily drive that precedes and underlies language; she associates the semiotic with the rhythms first experienced in relation to the maternal body (Kristeva). Music is, in this scheme, the art closest to the semiotic. Roy's memoir can be read as a struggle between these two registers. Its sentences precise, ironic, controlled belong to the symbolic; its music belongs to the semiotic, carrying the bodily and pre-verbal residue of a childhood lived under the sound of the mother's voice. Mary Roy appears in the memoir above all as a voice: commanding a school assembly,

wounding her daughter, filling rooms. The songs Roy clings to are counter-voices, alternative maternal sounds. McCartney singing of Mother Mary offers, in semiotic terms, the soothing maternal rhythm that the actual mother withheld, even as the song's symbolic content its counsel of surrender is refused. The title's irony is therefore not only rhetorical but psychic: Roy keeps the sound of comfort and rejects its meaning.

Roy also felt personally responsible for Lennon's assassination because, in her understanding, her devotion to the Beatles had been a form of guardianship, and her lapse of attention or faith had somehow left him unprotected. This episode reveals the depth of her identification with the Beatles, the degree to which they were not external cultural objects but internal and almost bodily presences in her life: "The next day John Lennon was assassinated. I felt personally responsible. I had dropped the baton. Inside me everything turned to rubble. I was too distraught to betray any signs of distress" (Roy 105). This is the language of devastation usually reserved for the loss of a person one loves. Roy is grieving Lennon the way one grieves a member of one's own family. She contains her overwhelming feeling behind a controlled surface, which is also exactly what the memoir as a whole does with her grief for her mother.

Roy's relationship with the Beatles throughout the memoir is shown to be fundamentally private and personal: "I sat alone in an absolutely empty movie theatre and watched a film of a Paul McCartney concert" (Roy 142). Roy is alone in an empty space, with the filmed presence of the man whose song titles her memoir.

The Sonic Autobiography

If Section III established "Let It Be" as the memoir's ironic counter-text, this section turns to the memoir's broader musical landscape the specific songs and sonic references through which Roy narrates her becoming. The argument here is that *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is a text in which music performs a structuring autobiographical function. Songs mark the thresholds of Roy's life departure and self-recognition that conventional autobiography assigns to events.

Autobiography theory, following Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's foundational work in *Reading Autobiography* (2001), has long understood life-writing as a practice of self-constitution rather than self-expression: "It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience" (Smith and Watson 25). Roy's sonic autobiography is a practice through which her self is constituted. The autobiographical subject is produced by the text and assembled through the acts of selection and interpretation that memoir demands. Music plays a central role in this process of self-constitution. When Roy reaches for a Beatles song to describe a moment in her life, she is using the song to know it to give it shape.

There are moments, however, when even the music she loves cannot hold her up: "Joe Cocker and Jimi Hendrix trailed me, falling about laughing. They made my life feel small and hopeless. Janis Joplin played the opening chords of 'Piece of My Heart' and then gave up and went away" (Roy 67). The image of Joplin beginning

"Piece of My Heart" and then giving up is especially resonant, since that song is itself about giving everything and being left with nothing. Roy here depicts moments when the self is too diminished even for the songs that usually sustain it.

Lawrence Kramer's musical hermeneutics is again instructive here. Kramer argues that music, when it enters a literary text, actively participates in the text's meaning-making. Musical references open what he calls hermeneutic windows: gaps in the text's verbal surface through which the music's own semantic and emotional world floods in, transforming the passage in which it appears. Each of Roy's musical references operates in this way, as interpretation.

Peter Kivy's work on musical representation offers a useful caution here. Kivy argues that music's power to represent the world is real but limited: music can resemble and suggest, but it cannot assert, and its expressive character is a matter of contour rather than content (Kivy 46-48). Kramer's hermeneutic windows should therefore not be mistaken for messages. The songs in Roy's memoir do not state propositions about her life; they lend their shapes to it. "She's Leaving Home" does not tell Roy what her departure means. It gives her departure a melodic and emotional outline that prose can then interpret. This distinction matters for the method of this paper: the readings offered here treat the songs as forms that organise feeling, not as codes that conceal statements.

"She's Leaving Home" is the memoir's most structurally significant musical reference, and it rewards the kind of close hermeneutic reading Kramer recommends. The song, from the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper' s Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), tells the story of a young woman who slips out of her parents' house before dawn. She leaves a note that says only that she is leaving for something she has waited for all her life. The parents respond with bewilderment, insisting that they gave her everything. The song simply holds the tension between the daughter's freedom and the parents' grief together, in the same musical space, unreconciled.

Roy listened to this song on repeat while deciding she would not return to Kerala is, as suggested in Section II, almost too resonant to require analysis. But the hermeneutic window the song opens in the memoir is worth dwelling on. "She's Leaving Home" is a song about the cost of leaving for everyone involved. Roy chooses it as the soundtrack of her own departure.

> In my head the Beatles went Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! I put my arm around Ammal'sshoulders. Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band, dressed in full regalia, got off the train, too, and followed us down the Kottayam railway station platform all the way to our school- hostel home on the hill. (Roy 94)

The music is woven into the most local and rooted moments of her life. Sgt. Pepper following her to the school-hostel home on the hill suggests that the music and the place, the global and the domestic, are not opposites in Roy's imagination. The song allows her to hold what might otherwise be irreconcilable: the necessity of going and the grief of those left behind. It is a more honest account of her departure. The music knows something the memoir's language is still catching up to.

R. Murray Schafer's concept of the soundscape adds a further dimension to this scene. Schafer treats every environment as an acoustic composition, anchored by keynote sounds that ground a community's life, and he gives the name schizophonia to the modern splitting of sound from its source through recording technology (Schafer 9). Roy's Kerala is rich in keynote sounds the river, the rain, the school bell, the church, the mother's voice and the imported records and radio broadcasts of the Beatles are schizophonic intrusions into that soundscape: sounds from elsewhere, detached from their origin and replanted in Kottayam. What Schafer describes as a pathology of modern listening becomes, in Roy's hands, a resource. Precisely because the music was severed from its source, it could be claimed, re-rooted, and made to mean locally. The image of Sgt. Pepper's band marching down the Kottayam platform is a perfect schizophonic fantasy: the recorded sound has acquired a body and entered the local soundscape on the listener's own terms.

The gift of the colour negatives of *Yellow Submarine* operates differently but with equal precision. *Yellow Submarine* (1968) is the Beatles at their most deliberately utopian. It is a film in which music is literally the force that restores colour and joy to a world drained of both by the Blue Meanies, figures of joyless authority. That it arrives as a gift positions it in the memoir as a talisman of a particular kind of world: one made possible by the imagination, by the willingness to take music seriously as a form of knowledge. The negatives are images not yet developed, and Roy at this moment is herself a negative: a self not yet fully developed, a writer not yet written, a life whose colours are still latent.

The identification of Pradip Krishen through his knowledge of the Beatles "he knew the Beatles backwards" (Roy 133) performs yet another autobiographical function. Here, musical knowledge becomes a taxonomy of the self. It is a way of sorting the world into those who are capable of the kind of attention that loving the Beatles backwards requires, and those who are not. This is epistemology. Roy is describing a habit of mind the willingness to take apart a cultural object and understand its construction that she recognises as kindred to her own. To know the Beatles backwards is to be the kind of person who interrogates them.

Roy's own voice makes the connection between music and her most pressured moments of self-formation explicit. By doing so, she reveals the dark comedy that reviewers have noted as characteristic of the memoir: "One jury member did, however, notice a graphic of half of a tiny yellow submarine at the bottom edge of the last sheet of my set of drawings and asked me what it was. I told him it was me, sailing away" (Roy 107). The tiny yellow submarine at the bottom of her architectural drawings is Roy signing her work with a Beatles reference, marking her professional self with the music that formed her.

What emerges from this survey of the memoir's musical references is a portrait of a woman who reached, at each threshold moment, for a piece of music that could hold what language could not yet say. This is what it means to call *Mother Mary Comes to Me* a sonic autobiography: music is one of its primary epistemological

instruments. To read the text without attending to this sonic dimension is to miss a register in which Roy is consistently at work.

Conclusion

Arundhati Roy began writing *Mother Mary Comes to Me* in grief, puzzled and more than a little ashamed by the intensity of her response to a mother she had spent most of her adult life at a careful distance from. What she produced is the brilliant biographical portrait of Mary Roy that reviewers have rightly praised. It is a text that thinks about what music does to a life: how it shapes identity before identity has language for itself and how it carries between generations things that neither party intended to transmit. To read *Mother Mary Comes to Me* through the frameworks this paper has brought to bear Barthes' grain of the voice, Kramer's musical hermeneutics, and Bhabha's third space is to recover a dimension of the text that its considerable critical reception has not yet addressed. It is to read it, for the first time, as a sonic autobiography.

The article's central argument has proceeded in two movements. The first established the irony of the memoir's title as a structural principle. "Let It Be" functions throughout the text as a counter-text. Drawing on Barthes, the paper argued that Roy separates the grain of McCartney's voice its warmth and its consoling materiality from the wisdom it delivers, borrowing the sonic register of consolation while refusing its content. The memoir is written in the acoustic shadow of a song it cannot agree with. This is dialectical: the title keeps "Let It Be" alive as a genuine alternative.

The second movement turned to the memoir's broader musical landscape, arguing through Kramer's hermeneutic framework that Roy's sonic references "She's Leaving Home," *Yellow Submarine*, the identification of Pradip Krishen through his knowledge of the Beatles, the invocation of Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix are structuring autobiographical events. Each song opens a hermeneutic window in the memoir's verbal surface, flooding the text with meanings that exceed what Roy explicitly says. "She's Leaving Home" names the emotional complexity of Roy's departure from Kerala more honestly than any prose account could. The colour negatives of *Yellow Submarine* figure Roy herself as a latent image. Together, these references constitute what this paper has called a sonic autobiography.

Mother Mary Comes to Me represents a significant and undertheorized addition to the canon of Indian women's life-writing. Existing critical frameworks such as feminist biography and the literature of maternal ambivalence illuminate important dimensions of the text but leave its sonic architecture largely unread. This paper has argued that music-literature theory, in conjunction with the psychoanalytic and postcolonial frameworks the text demands, offers the most complete account of what Roy is doing and why it matters. Roy has said that the title chose her and that "Let It Be" arrived before she fully understood why. It brought with it McCartney's dead mother, Roy's dead mother, and the long history of women who have been shelters and storms to their daughters.

This reading also opens directions for further research. A comparative study of sound and music in Indian women's life-writing from Kamala Das onward would test how far the sonic autobiography is a wider form rather than the feature of one writer. The memoir's relationship to *The God of Small Things* deserves a study of its own, attentive to the sounds the novel and the memoir share. And the framework developed here, joining Barthes, Kramer, Kristeva, and Schafer, could be carried to other texts in which a popular song sits at the centre of a life. What this paper has established is the ground for such work: *Mother Mary Comes to Me* asks to be heard as well as read, and criticism that listens to it finds a book in which a daughter answers a song, and a mother, that never stopped sounding in her ear.

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