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Cliff Richard's self-presentation as a redeemer

ANJA LÖBERT

Ludwig-Wucherer-Straße 57, 06108 Halle, Germany
E-mail: anja.loebert@gmx.de

Abstract

Although tremendously popular, Great Britain's long-term icon Cliff Richard has been widely neglected by popular music studies. This article aims to correct this omission by introducing an argument that claims that Cliff Richard portrays himself to a considerable degree as a saviour figure. Evidence for this thesis will be drawn from three meaningful dimensions in popular music: song lyrics, pictorial self-representations, and image components. These three areas can be shown to be semantically concordant in presenting Cliff Richard as a redeemer. While the promise of redemption by the singer persona is a recurring motif in his song lyrics, this assurance gets repeated in pictorial representations that make allusions to Jesus Christ (through posture, lighting, and elevation) and is further reinforced by a number of components of Richard's image such as the (apparently) incorruptible body, the asexuality, and the demonstrative benevolence towards the sick and poor. The combination of these sign-complexes creates a meaningful pattern around the singer that sets him apart as a surrogate saviour.

Introduction

Although the British singer Cliff Richard is an unprecedented phenomenon in popular music, the discipline of popular music studies has by and large disregarded him in its research to date.[1] This is problematic. Sir Cliff may fail to embody many values highly regarded by both the discipline as a whole and its scholars. He may represent a conservative world view and a religious fundamentalism. Moreover, his music may lack innovation and hence be deemed somewhat inconsequential. But unless the purpose of popular music studies' endeavour is merely to create a canon of the 'great' or the 'cool' musicians, we ought to acknowledge the objective accomplishments which confirm the singer's social significance. In terms of popularity, Cliff Richard has been anything but inconsequential: successfully releasing records since 1958, his singles and albums still regularly reach chart positions in the Top 10. In 1996 his contributions to pop music were confirmed by his knighthood, and his popularity is such that he is frequently referred to as a 'cultural institution'[2] of Great Britain. On the more statistical side, we have to acknowledge that Cliff Richard has spent more weeks in the British charts than any other singer or band, except for Elvis Presley. According to the *Guinness Book of British Hit Singles*, he comes second in the Top 100 artists of all time.[3]

My research has been devoted to Cliff Richard's self-presentation in terms of production, the star's significance for the fan in terms of reception, and the interrelation between the two. For this purpose, I have analysed song lyrics, official picture

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releases, and video footage, with the outcome that one major thrust of his self-presentation appears to be his portrayal as a redeemer figure. In addition to that, I have conducted an ethnographic survey among Cliff Richard fan club members in Merseyside, with the aim of understanding the personal circumstances that provided the context of their initial attraction to the star, the meaning he has in their lives, and the particular aspects of Cliff Richard they relate to in their fandom.

The thesis generating from my research to date is that the relationship between Cliff Richard and his fans appears to rely to a considerable degree on the myth of redemption which the singer offers and the fan seeks. In the paper at hand, I would like to introduce that part of my argument which claims that Cliff Richard portrays himself as a saviour figure.

Come to me, all who are weary
and find life burdensome, and I
will refresh you. Take my yoke
upon your shoulders and learn
from me, for I am gentle and humble
of heart. Your souls will find
rest, for my yoke is easy and my
burden light. (Jesus to Matthew, Matthew 11: 28–30)

The song lyrics

The promise of redemption is a recurring motif in the lyrics of Cliff Richard's songs. To illustrate this, I will first present a selection of his song lyrics that contain these offers of salvation made by the first person narrator, and subsequently discuss whether and to what extent these can be read as valid indicators for Cliff Richard's self-presentation as a redeemer figure.

In this following first example – the song 'Remember Me' – the singer-persona presents itself as a guardian angel who will turn darkness to light, ease fear and danger, and who would never let the listener fall. He does so by offering the addressee a place to turn to in their disorientation:

(Remember me) oh when (. . .) you need someone to lean on
(Remember me) I am you guardian angel,
And I'll never let you fall
And if you're ever in fear or danger
(Remember me) I am the one
Who will turn all your darkness to light.[4]

Comparable mildness and salvation from human misery is vowed in the lyrics of the more recent song 'Let Me Be the One'. It is particularly the release from loneliness that is being promised here, if only we surrender to the singer-persona. Remarkable in its recurrence is the light/darkness metaphor, which I will get back to in a later section of my analysis.

When the darkness surrounds you,
And you cannot see your way.
When the loneliness finds you,
And there is no hiding place.
Never give up believing,
Love will save the day.

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Open up the gates,
You closed around your heart.
Someone is waiting to come in.
Let me be the one,
That you hold on to.
I will bring the sun to shine on you.
Your lonely days are gone.
The best is yet to come,
If you let me be the one.

When the weight on your shoulders
Is too much to bear.
There's no burden too heavy,
That cannot be shared.
You can run into my heart,
Lay your troubles there.[5]

It gets interesting when we take the spelling of the chorus line 'let me be the one' into consideration. While the official booklet of the CD does not write out the words 'me' and 'one' in capital letters, virtually all fan-based lyric databases to be found on the Internet represent the lyrics as 'Let *M*e be the *O*ne'.[6] This could be read as a form of interpretation by the fans, who take the lyrical speaker to be God. They seem to be able to decode when their favourite singer is speaking from God's perspective and when he is not. However, the dividing line of interpretation is not so stable and clear. The following excerpt from an interview with Cliff Richard fan Yvonne M. illustrates the difficulty of where the Deity ends and the singer begins:

You said in the questionnaire that 'Let me be the one' is the song that touches you most. Why is that?

It makes me realise that God loves me no matter what. And that I should let him be the one and I don't always do let him be the centre of my life.

So you see it from God's perspective – not Cliff's.

Yeah. Well, I think it changes. Part of the lyrics, like 'when the weight on your shoulders is too much to bear', I think that can flicker between that being Cliff and being friends. But the main lyric, that I relate to more, is about resting in God, and that's the bit I relate to more.[7]

More light, guidance and redemption from loneliness is to be found in the song 'Lost in a Lonely World', dating from 1981:

To be a light to you is what I intend to do
To show the way you know you ought to go
So take the hand that I offer to you
To see the truth that you will be no longer
Lost in a lonely word.

As well as more release from fear and sadness in 1989's song 'Share a Dream':

Hey when you're feeling low, and the blues refuse to let you go,
Just reach out for my hand, cos I can understand, c'mon share a dream with me
We can rise above all the tears, all the doubts and the fear.

Guidance to be healed is made explicit in 'Healing Love', dating from 1993:

Now, I can see that you're feeling sad, (. . .)
Hey, my friend you can take my hand,
And I'll show your heart a power that's real,
It will never let you down (. . .)

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When it all comes down to the push and shove,
We can make it through, we can rise above,
Cos you know that we've got the power of healing love.

Whereas the lyrical speaker is not claiming to *be* this power of healing love, he devotes himself to showing the addressee the way to this power.[8]

In the following excerpt it is again the cushioning or comforting after a hurt that must be of interest for us:

Well if anyone should harm you, anyone should get in your way
And you need someone to talk to, please call me right away.

Here, a dividing line is drawn between the addressee and an outside ('they', 'people') that is described as unpleasant and hurtful. The singer-persona clearly allies himself with the listener and functions as a protector: 'If anyone should harm you, please call me right away'.

Later in the chorus, the listener is reassured of the strength of the lyrical speaker's love:

My love is stronger than that
My love is deeper than that
My love is deeper than the ocean.[9]

The same principle of this me-and-them-polarisation can be found in the lyrics of the well-known success 'Some People' from 1986, which contains the words:

Some people they hurt one another [. . .]
But I'm not like that at all
Some people they use one another
Not like lovers do
Well I'm not like that at all.

As an observation, it seems interesting that the same motif had been expressed by Richard some twenty years before the songs just discussed. Already in 1967 he sings: 'When the world in which you're living gets a bit too much to bear and the people on the sidewalk seem to form a solid wall, you're gonna find me, way out in the country'.[10] It is again other people and the difficulty of coping with the inhabited world, from which the singer-persona offers asylum. Instead of the economically satisfactory designation 'out in the country', it also should not be overlooked that the phrase 'way out' is chosen. This seems to inspire associations of liberation from an emergency. Although invitations and resorts of refuge are to be discovered in an earlier phase of Richard's œuvre, it is usually not a person that promises deliverance. Instead, a saving situation or environment is described, often in relation to nature and countryside. Examples of this are 'Summer Holiday' (1963), in which it says with reference to summer vacation, 'no more worries for me or you, it's a dream come true' and 'On the Beach' (1964) where it says 'your troubles will be out of reach, on the beach'.

That those semantics of redemption, of incorruptible and undying love originating from the lyrical speaker, have now become an anticipatable and reliable component in Cliff Richard's lyrical contents, is corroborated by an example from a more recent album of the singer. Here it says:

The day that I stop loving you
Could never come to be
I know that even if the sun and moon

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By chance collide or space and time
Should split in two
There'll never be the day that I stop loving you.[11]

This selection of examples introduces a recurring motif in Cliff Richard's songs which presents the singer-persona as a redeeming friend with an ever-understanding, ever-loving, trustworthy character.

However, the inevitable question that needs to be asked at this point is to what extent Cliff Richard is actually saying 'I am the Saviour', or to what extent he is merely saying, in poetic language, 'trust in the Saviour'. Since he is a Christian himself, he will want to spread the 'good news'. Yet, why so consistently use first person singular? There would be functional alternatives, as his duet with Van Morrison (and indeed a lot of Van Morrison's poetry) indicates:

When I am lonely as I can be
Then I know that God shines His light on me
Reach out for Him, He'll be there
With Him your troubles, you can share.[12]

As it is, there is little that would stop listeners from reading Cliff Richard's first person narratives as genuine promises and accounts of himself. There are no signifiers in the vocal or musical performance of the songs to mean, 'By the way, I'm not talking about myself here' or 'Mind you, I'm just being ironic'. On the contrary, the vocal and musical surroundings reinforce an atmosphere of sincerity rather than irony. Let us take the discussed songs 'Remember Me', 'Some People' and 'Let Me Be the One' as examples: Richard's voice, performing with a breathy, velvet-like and vulnerable quality, creates an intimate ambience, hence serving as the vocal reinforcement and anchor of what is signified on the lyrical plane. Listeners with Christian beliefs may yet decode Richard's first person narrative style as a poetic device for the message 'trust and worship Jesus!',[13] but I wonder whether non-Christian fans are likely to register or even care for the more abstract, religious meaning of this first-person-narrative. If the 'I'-referent remains unspecified, the assumption suggests itself that it actually refers to the man performing it so sincerely: Cliff Richard.

More fundamentally though, it is not so much the question whether or not Richard is merely pursuing missionary endeavours as a Christian by means of this poetry, or whether he is, in fact, presenting himself as the Saviour. My argument wishes to focus more on the observation that Cliff Richard seems to have established a remarkably consistent public persona which presents him as a friend in need, a bridge to happiness and, hence, a figure modelling itself on Jesus Christ. The message is not so much 'I am the Saviour', as 'I am a saviour (of some sort)'. This thesis, I hope, will become more compelling once we start looking at the extra-lyrical components of the analysis, starting with the iconography.

The pictorial representation

The symbolism of redemption can not only be found on the lyrical plane, but continues on the visual plane. Let us take an analytical look at the official release shown in Figure 1. Both arms are spread out at an angle of 110 degrees from the body and reach out towards the sun. The palms of his hands are opened, the face entirely bathed in sunlight. The figure is photographed from a low angle camera perspective through a transparent sky.

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Figure 1. Richard (2001), 'Let Me Be the One', CD single sleeve.

I would like to proceed by selecting individual semantic components of this image to contextualise them, and to analyse how far they allude to the pictorial and symbolic representation of Jesus Christ. The components of interest here will be: the posture, the light, and the superhuman dimension of the shown figure.

The posture

A variation of this open-armed posture can be found in a multitude of picture and motion picture releases of Cliff Richard. In the video clip for the song 'Millennium Prayer', for instance, we can see a few second's worth of a camera shot in which the singer stretches out his arms like the crucified Jesus (Figure 2). This religious interpretation suggests itself for at least three reasons. Firstly, this pose is expressed in a clearly religious semantic field, since the singer recites 'The Lord's Prayer', like Jesus once did to his listeners. Secondly, the intertextual comparison with other examples from the pop music genre gives us reason to interpret Richard's gesture in a religious way. In the visuals of Michael Jackson, for instance, we can discover a video montage in which Jackson in a pose just like our object of analysis transforms into a luminescent crucifix.[14] Two further examples are to be mentioned in this context: in a television appearance, Robbie Williams, in a similar stance, sings the words: 'I sit and talk to god'; also, the boyband Take That can be seen throwing their bodies towards the sky with outstretched arms in the visual to their song entitled 'Pray'.

All of these examples exhibit a structural similarity. Not only is the gesture of the outstretched arms recurrently uttered in a Christian-religious context (a crucifix in Jackson's case, God in Williams' case, praying in both Take That's and Cliff Richard's case), but also these recurring associations are expressed in the same socio-cultural sphere, namely the genre of Western popular music.

The third reason that might bring us to read Richard's posture as an allusion to Jesus Christ becomes apparent when we take a look at Jesus' graphic representation

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Figure 2. Richard (1999), 'Millennium Prayer', promo video.

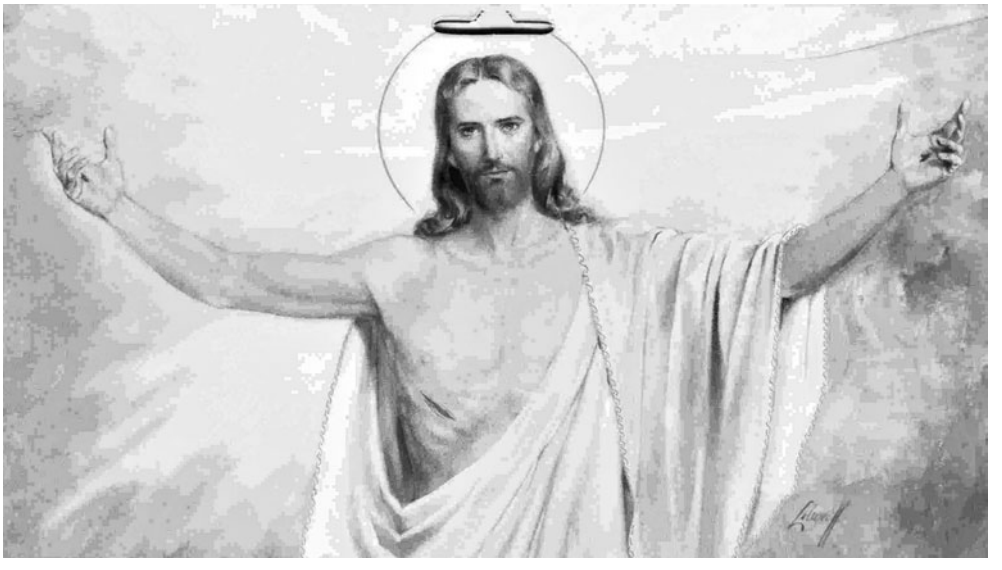


Figure 3. Church Art Calendar (2003), CBC, Reproducta Co. Inc., 2002.

itself. For this purpose two examples will be shown that illustrate the resemblance to Cliff Richard's self-presentation. This first illustration exemplifies the resurrected Jesus with nimbus, aureole, and outstretched arms (Figure 3). The second picture shows the well-known Rio de Janeiro monument 'Christ, the Redeemer' (Figure 4). Like a synecdoche that points to the original redeemer, this Jesus posture is to be encountered in Cliff Richard's self-presentation, as the selection of photographs in Figures 5 and 6 illustrates.[15]

One might argue, however, that this well-familiar posture is merely part of a rock singer performance tradition which often involves singers standing in the spotlight with arms perpendicular to their bodies. However, two arguments might counter these objections. Firstly, it remains to be explored in greater detail to what extent this rock performance convention itself has Messianic roots, and is a sign that, for this very reason, was attractive to and appropriated by popular musicians. Secondly, in Cliff Richard's case, the outstretched arms should not be diminished as arbitrary or equated with, for example, Marilyn Manson's outstretched arms. Manson clearly

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Figure 4. Statue Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, © Anja Löbert.

marks his act as ironic by publicly criticising Christianity and, for instance, calling his album *Antichrist Superstar*, whereas Cliff Richard has in play a multitude of concordant signifiers (some already discussed in this paper, some still to come) which give his posture a determinate and positive religious *anchorage*.[16]

This section of the article has elaborated the argument that the posture of the open arms, which is one aspect of Cliff Richard's gesture on videos, single-covers and concert shows, is to be interpreted as an allusion to Jesus Christ. This thesis remains, regardless of Richard's actual intention. We cannot know, or begin to explore, the intended meaning of his behaviour, for it is concealed even to himself, as Sigmund Freud has taught us. We have to suffice with the objectified output material at our disposal, and analyse it in relation to other material that appears to be of the same kind and of similar structural components.

The light

The second meaningful aspect of Figure 1, whose elaboration promises to be fruitful, is the light. First note that in the illumination we can find a visual continuation of the light-semantic already encountered in several of Richard's song lyrics, such as:

> When the darkness surrounds you (. . .) I will bring the sun to shine on you. ('Let Me Be the One')
> I am the one (. . .) who will turn all your darkness to light. ('Remember Me')
> I will be there to brighten up even your darkest night. ('You've Got a Friend', cover)

We also encounter the appearance of a meaningful light in pictorial contexts. So, for instance, in the illustration shown in Figure 7 which welcomed the visitor at the singer's official homepage in 2001. A similar picture was chosen again when the official website was renewed in 2003. We can see rays originating from a central point behind the singer (Figure 8). We also find this illumination in the promotional video for the song 'Healing Love'. In this, the singer initially throws back body and face towards a light shining down on him before he reaches his hand out to it entirely in the final camera-shot (Figure 9). Lyrically the song is concerned with the healing power of love.

In the interpretation of the light we will again see how far Christian iconography takes us. The literature on Christian symbolism teaches us:

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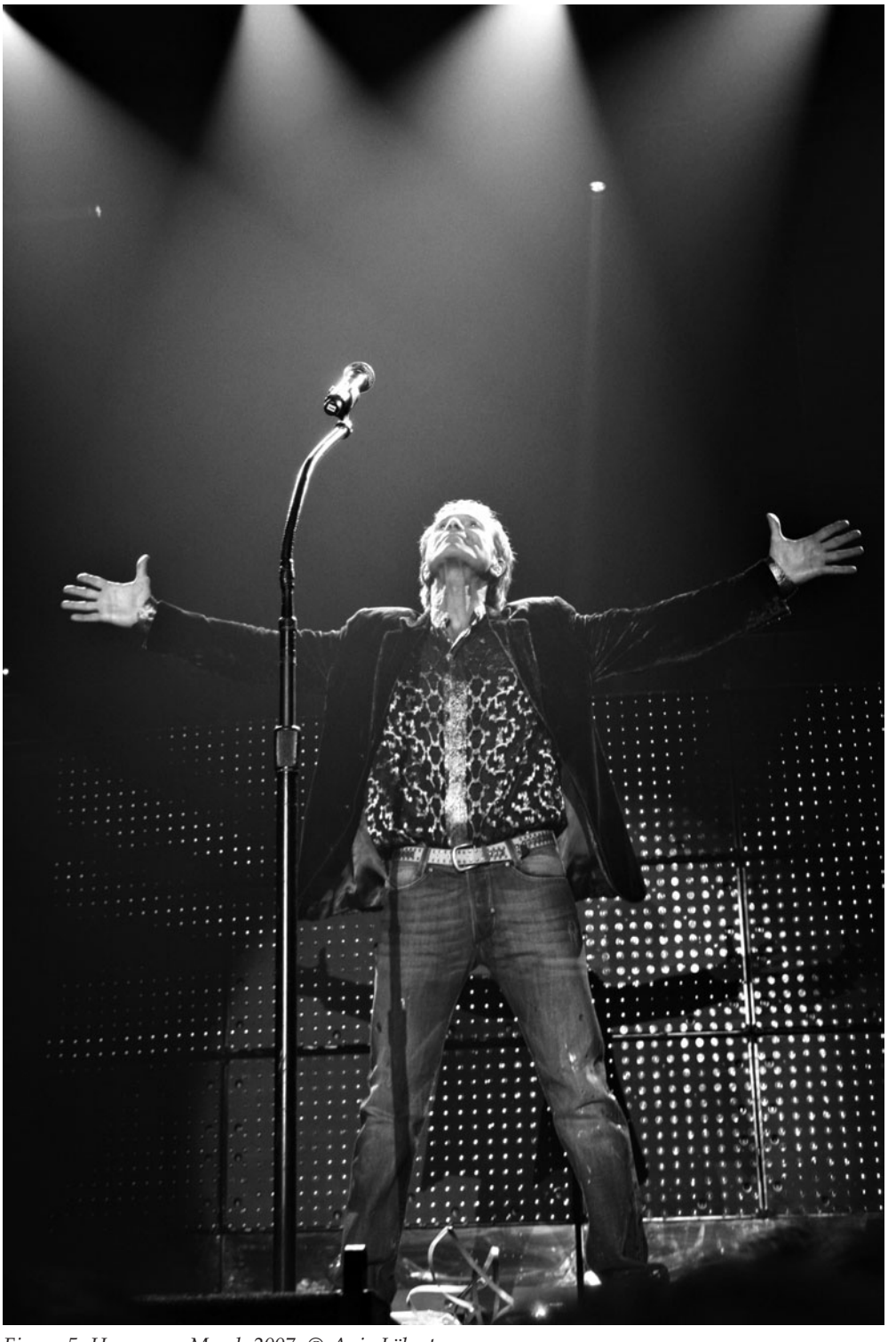


Figure 5. Hannover, March 2007, © Anja Löbert.

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Figure 6. Richard in concert, January 2004, © The Photo Agency.



Figure 7. Richard, January 2003, © Official website of Cliff Richard.

Light is symbolic of Christ, in reference to His words in John 8:12: Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.[17]

The origin of the light appearing in Figures 7 and 8, as well as in the promotional video, seems to be a spotlight, yet, our main visual representation of Cliff Richard in Figure 1 shows him in the sunlight. With reference to the meaning of the sun we can learn:

The sun is symbolic for Christ, this interpretation being based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:2: But unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.[18]

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Figure 8. Richard, November 2003, © Official Cliff Richard website.

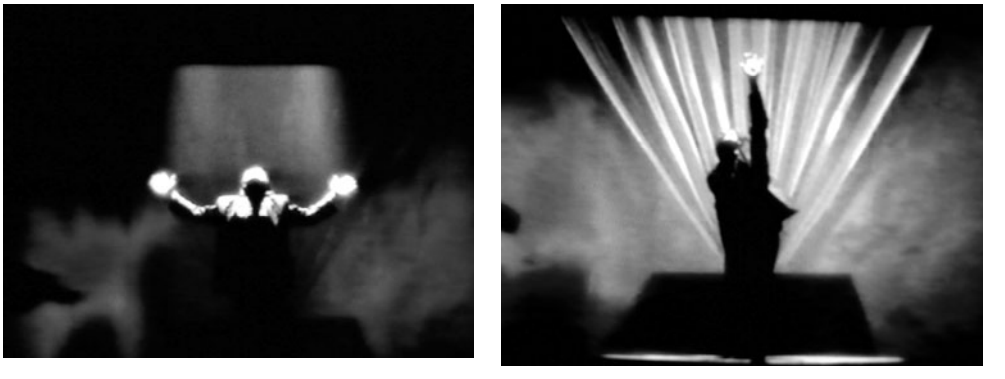


Figure 9. Richard (1994), 'Healing Love', promo video.

Here, light and sun are directly linked with healing.

In Christian art we frequently encounter divine figures who are marked as such by an aura of light, called 'aureole', or halo. The latter originates as a zone of light from behind the head of a divine or sacred person[19], as can be seen in Figure 10. Commonly the aureole frames the body of Jesus Christ.[20] In some cases, according to George Ferguson, 'it is removed from the body and is composed of many luminous rays issuing from a central point'.[21] This puts Figure 7 in an interesting perspective, since there the rays originate slightly beside and behind the body of the singer.

It need not weaken the thesis of this article that we fail to find the symbolic presentation of the Christian art reproduced in faithful detail in Cliff Richard's self-presentation. On the long cultural journey from the Christian art of the renaissance to the genre of popular music of the twentieth century, the symbol undergoes transforming appropriations. With respect to our case, this might mean

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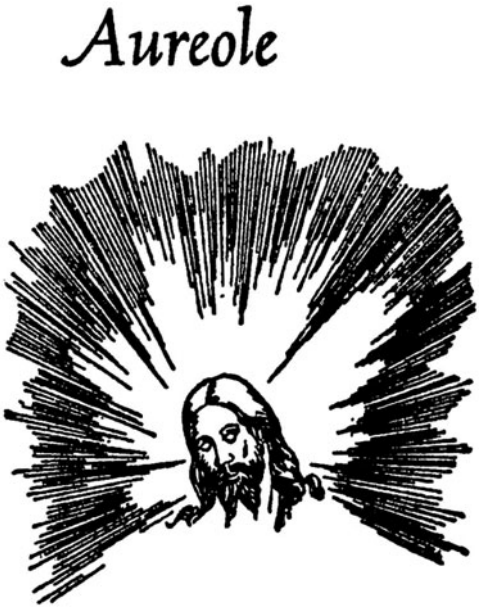


Figure 10. Signs and Symbols in Christian Art *by George Ferguson (1977), p. 148.*

that the luminous atmosphere, as well as the light-generating zones surrounding Cliff Richard, may indeed allude to a Jesus-role he is taking on.

Also, one might argue against the interpretation of the light held in this section, that there is no inevitability to see it as a signifier pointing to Jesus Christ, that it is merely the sort of glamour spotlight we are well familiar with through Hollywood's star-photography. Yet, this view would neglect to take into account the multitude of signifiers in play simultaneously which create the context for reading of the light in this way. Looked at in isolation, it has no meaning; though in conjunction with other signs of his self-presentation and his image as a whole, indeed, the singer establishes a semantic field, in which light refers to Christ, healing and redemption, and Cliff Richard himself inevitably comes across as the personification of these ideas.

The super-human dimension

As the final component of the reference image (Figure 1) we should like to consider Richard's physical height as well as camera angle. The visual effect of superimposition makes the singer appear to be a figure located in the sky – a heavenly figure, one might say. Furthermore, the low position of the camera demands our attention, since it is a cinematic-photographic convention which we know emphasises the supremacy and power of the illustrated figure.[22]

This narrative device of actual and symbolic body-enlargement is to be found on numerous occasions in Cliff Richard's self-presentation. For instance, on the album cover (Figure 11) dating from 1998, we can see him colossus-like, sitting on a rooftop in urban surroundings. This notion of the colossus alluded to in this image is reminiscent of the 'Colossus of Rhodes', a statue of the Greek sun-god. In addition to that, the singer's physical elevation above the heads of the audience was chosen as a special effect at his 'Cliff Richard – The Event' concert at the Wembley Stadium in 1991.

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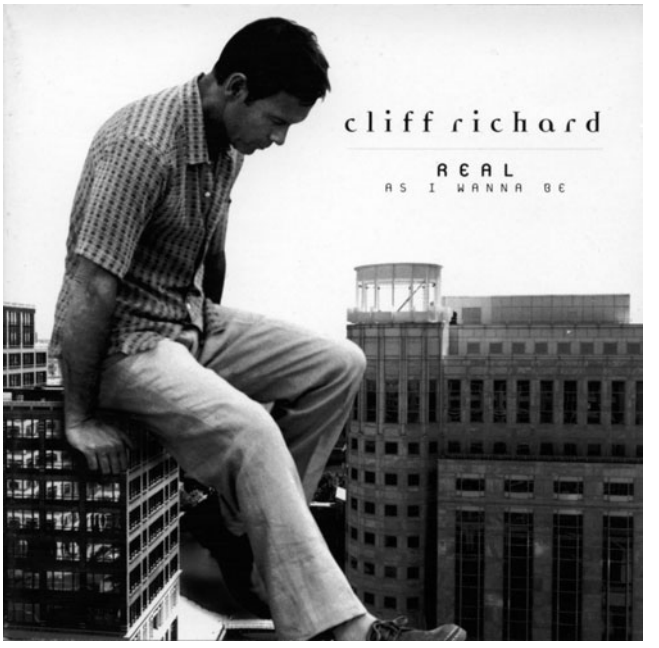


Figure 11. Richard (1998), Real as I Wanna Be*, CD sleeve.*

During the performance of the song 'Remember Me' (a song whose redemption-promising lyrics we have already examined), the singer, all dressed in white, is standing on a small platform that gradually arises heavenwards as he promises to the upturned faces: 'Remember me, I am your guardian angel, and I'll never let you fall. And if you're ever in fear or danger, remember me!' Later on at the same concert this is followed by another ascent, when he sings the last song from a pedestal surrounded by three dozen dancers, backing vocalists and musicians. This also could be read as an allusion to Jesus' ascent into heaven.

I would like to consult another item of interobjective comparison material,[23] which condenses all the aforementioned components, and combines them in one single performance. Michael Jackson's appearance at the Brit Awards in 1996 leaves no doubt about its biblical references and the singer's self-portrayal as Jesus Christ. First, Jackson introduces himself in a symbolic act of audience-directed descent. This is reminiscent of Jesus, who also descended mercifully from heaven to the people, taking on human form. Jackson then disappears in light that pervades him, whose source he seems to be. Shortly after this, impoverished, suffering people dressed in rags gather around him, before he impatiently jumps at a mini-tribune that elevates him over the heads of the people and the audience. Back on earth like the mortal ones, he touches their longing hands, and soon pulls the worldly clothing from off his body, reinventing himself in pure, all-white silk. With a benevolent expression he stretches out his arms in a 90 degree angle from his chest. Again light begins to pervade him, appearing to issue from behind his back, and into which he vanishes entirely at times. The poor and longing begin to nestle to Jackson, in order to be blessed by his healing touch.

After addressing a few preaching words to the audience, he slowly steps towards the glaring light along with numerous followers. Then the slit in which they

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disappear closes.[24] This textbook stage show of a popular music performer portraying himself as Jesus Christ so unequivocally is encountered very rarely. In this Brit Awards performance we can find it in a remarkably pure and dense fashion.

With regard to the less concentrated, somewhat tamed self-presentation of our object of analysis, Cliff Richard, one can say that there are components in his self-portrayal that make semantic allusion to redemption in a wider sense and Jesus Christ, the original redeemer, in a narrower one. A significant number of his songs make this promise of deliverance linguistically explicit. In addition to that, it is also possible to find symbolic allusions to the pictorial representation of Jesus Christ, the personification of redemption and salvation, in Cliff Richard's pictorial self-presentation and concert shows. These examples seem to make evident that Cliff Richard can be seen as a star-figure in popular music who, among other things, portrays himself as a saviour.

In the final section, I would like to add further evidence supporting my thesis that Cliff Richard presents himself as a Jesus-figure. I will focus on three selected components of his image: his self-presentation as a benevolent person, the incorruptible body, and Cliff Richard's apparent asexuality. The image is intensely significant for this analysis, because it provides the context in which every other signifier put forward by Cliff Richard is to be read: his lyrics, gestures, voice, and music.

Cliff Richard's image

Benevolence towards the needy

A widely known and significant aspect of Cliff Richard's public self is his contribution towards needy and sickly people. His commitments towards that end can be illustrated on three levels. Firstly, by looking at his work in charity organisations; secondly, by evaluating visual representations of his visits to the developing world; and thirdly, by taking into account the immediate, personal level of convalescence visits to his fans.

Cliff Richard's organised benevolence can be divided up into regular and occasional commitments. Since 1968 the singer has actively supported the international Christian foreign aid organisation Tear Fund, whose Vice President he is. It says on his official website: 'As well as donating the proceeds from numerous gospel concerts to their work, over the years he has visited their projects in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Haiti and Bulgaria'.[25]

While his support for Tear Fund is directed towards developing countries, as the president of the *British Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation* he supports indigenous cancer research. There is even an umbrella organisation, the Sir Cliff Richard Charitable Trust, allocating and organising Richard's benevolence: 'Grants are made by the trust every quarter, with about 50 different registered charities benefiting each time. Priority is given to charities working in medical research, with children and the elderly, and those involved with the physically and/or mentally disabled. While these form the main focus, obviously other charities, which *Cliff* would also like to encourage, do receive help from time to time'.[26]

The more irregular charitable efforts of Cliff Richard can be witnessed in the participation in charity shows – such as Children in Need or the German José Carreras Gala against cancer – or when the entire revenue of single releases is donated to the

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Save the Children Fund – as was done with the number one hits 'Living Doll', 1984 (with The Young Ones) and 'Millennium Prayer', 1999.

The Christian foreign aid organisation Tear Fund has released a number of videos which show Cliff Richard visiting countries in the developing world. As the accompanying text of a Haiti video of this type reads: 'The [. . .] film captures *Cliff*'s enthusiasm at the positive steps being taken with Tear Fund's support, *to bring help and hope to those in need and particularly to children*' (Richard 1984, VHS, my italics)

One video shows Cliff Richard's visit to numerous aid projects in Kenya, another in Uganda. In a rather impressively intimate scene of the latter, Cliff Richard kneels down to look into the eyes of a woman confined to bed who is suffering from AIDS. While he is holding her hand, he embarks upon a prayer for her which ushers in the recitation of 'The Lord's Prayer'.

The most recent Tear Fund video release *Welcome to my World* features Cliff Richard meeting children in Cambodia, whose lives are impaired by HIV infections. A press article reads: 'Sir *Cliff*, himself, says: ''Children are vulnerable to abuse and it's vital that we get involved on a regular basis'', so that even children in poverty are not denied a secure childhood'. [27]

Furthermore, there are numerous autobiographical books with missionary contents released within the past thirty years in which Cliff Richard can be found photographed among desperately poor, diseased, and starving human beings. The picture shown in Figure 12, taken in Bangladesh, is an example of that: with a concerned, compassionate expression on his face he kneels down watching over two malnourished children. Figure 13 shows the singer in *Mother Theresa's home for the Destitute and Dying* in Calcutta: again, among the most unfortunate people, a context in which he emerges as the 'benevolent European'. These two images can be seen as representatives of a multitude of similar illustrations to be found in Cliff Richard's autobiographies, 'Which One's Cliff' and 'You, me and Jesus': Richard surrounded by African children, shaking their hands, singing for tribes, holding sick children in his arms.

This compassionate, benevolent attitude towards the sick is continued on yet another level. The British television, for instance, broadcast one of his visits to a woman's hospital, showing his exchange with staff and patients.[28] In my field-work, a female fan told me about a long-lasting stay in hospital during which she was surprised by Sir Cliff, albeit not because of a personal convalescence visit:

> So, I had a road traffic accident just over 17½ years ago, and I was in hospital for 3½ years. It was a very serious road traffic accident. I had 92% breakages in my body. And I don't know how I lived. I had nine major operations on my bones to get things back together again, [. . .] But I lived through that. But I was in bed all the time. Doctor's orders, and I was pretty fed up. So I'm opening my letters, and this white letter – it was 'Dear Maroulla, I hope you get well soon. All the best, Cliff!' And it was an actual card from Cliff. [. . .] Someone in the fan club wrote to Cliff Richard and said what a serious accident I had. Is it possible to send her a get well card? [. . .] I screamed with delight.[29]

The performance of these charitable activities, on all the levels mentioned in this section, contribute considerably to Cliff Richard's image as an ethically acceptable, 'wholesome' man who cares for fellow human beings. They support his public perception as a 'friend in need'. His promise of redemption, made in the lyrics of some of his songs, is acted out realistically in these benevolent deeds. They are likely to prove to the audience, once more, that the words sung are neither idle nor ironic, but

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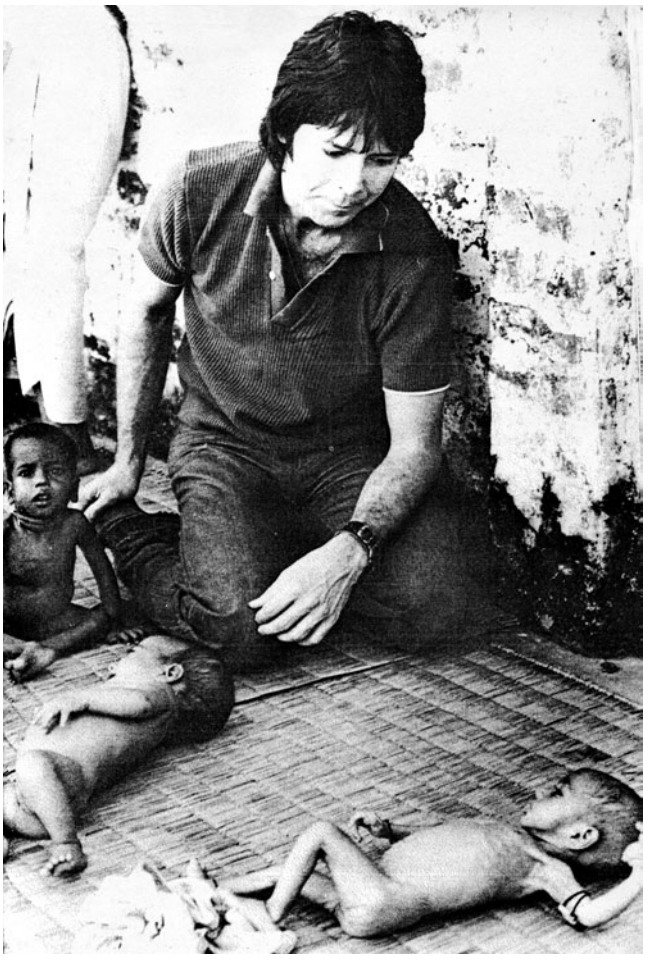


Figure 12. Which One's Cliff *by Cliff Richard (1977), p. 137.*

sincere. What is reinforced here, furthermore, are the references and analogies to Jesus, who also devoted himself to the healing of the sick and needy.

The incorruptible body

If we take a look at the drawing shown in Figure 14, dating from the eleventh century, we see how Jesus Christ chains and overpowers death. In comparable fashion, Cliff Richard appears to overcome the natural process of ageing. Assuming that Ernest Becker was right when he pointed out that Western society is repressing and denying death,[30] Cliff Richard might be regarded as a cultural phenomenon that lends itself to this denial. Where the glaring light of unruly transitority shines through every crack of life, Richard caters for his admirers' starving need for immortality. Persistently performing in front of a widely praising audience for fifty years, he has become a consistent parameter for the public. Particularly, though, he has been a constant companion in the life of his followers, many of whom first became fans in their early teenage years and, for the past three, four, sometimes nearly five decades, have been

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Figure 13. Which One's Cliff *by Cliff Richard (1977), p. 143.*

living a life in which they could count on the public presence of Cliff Richard. This image of immortality and continuity gets re-enacted on the plane of his lyrics. For instance, in words like these:

And then this world so full of change
One truth will constantly remain
I will always be here
So you never need to even ask me
Girl you can believe
Now that we taste of everlasting.[31]

Making the image even more coherent, these immortal tendencies get reinforced by the deliberate presentation of his body on the iconographical level. He appears to (want to) embody the myth of everlasting youth (Figure 15).[32] We witness here a perfectly unlined sixty-one-year-old Cliff Richard. The lack of wrinkles though is not in accordance with reality, as video footage from the same era proves, but they are a creation of skilful digital image-editing.

This part of the analysis is by no means as thorough as it could be. What would be needed are replications of assertions from the singer, as well as an evaluation of his youthfully agile stage performance in recent years. However, I hope it has been made plausible that the denial of death which Cliff Richard seems to personify can be seen as one factor in the whole of the semantic field that suggests the singer's reading as a Jesus-figure.

Asexuality

Another relevant component of Richard's image is that of his sexual inoffensiveness. Not only is he an unmarried Christian fundamentalist with a decisively celibate lifestyle,[33] but in contrast to singers like Mick Jagger, Tom Jones, and Elvis Presley, he is normally not associated with sexiness. This is just a matter of taste, one might object,

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Fig. 77.—JESUS CHRIST CHAINS AND OVERPOWERS DEATH.

German Miniature of the XI cent.

Figure 14. Christian Iconograpy *by Adolphne Napoleon Didron (1851), p. 300.*

since his fans will certainly defend his sexual appeal with ardour. And indeed, there are sexual allusions to be found to some extent in Cliff Richard's self-presentation. Yet, these are too rare and thin to be considered a core aspect of his image, especially since those sexualised gestures are very frequently marked as self-deprecating jokes. As we have seen in an earlier section of the paper, the love he is singing about in his song lyrics is the *redeeming* love, the *healing* love, and the *comforting* love. It is certainly not *sexual*, *passionate*, and *seductive* love.

The same characteristic of sexual inoffensiveness can be discovered in his singing voice: controlled, with an absolutely professional check on it, soft, gentle, and in every sense conveying comforting warmth rather than unsettling anxiety, cleansed

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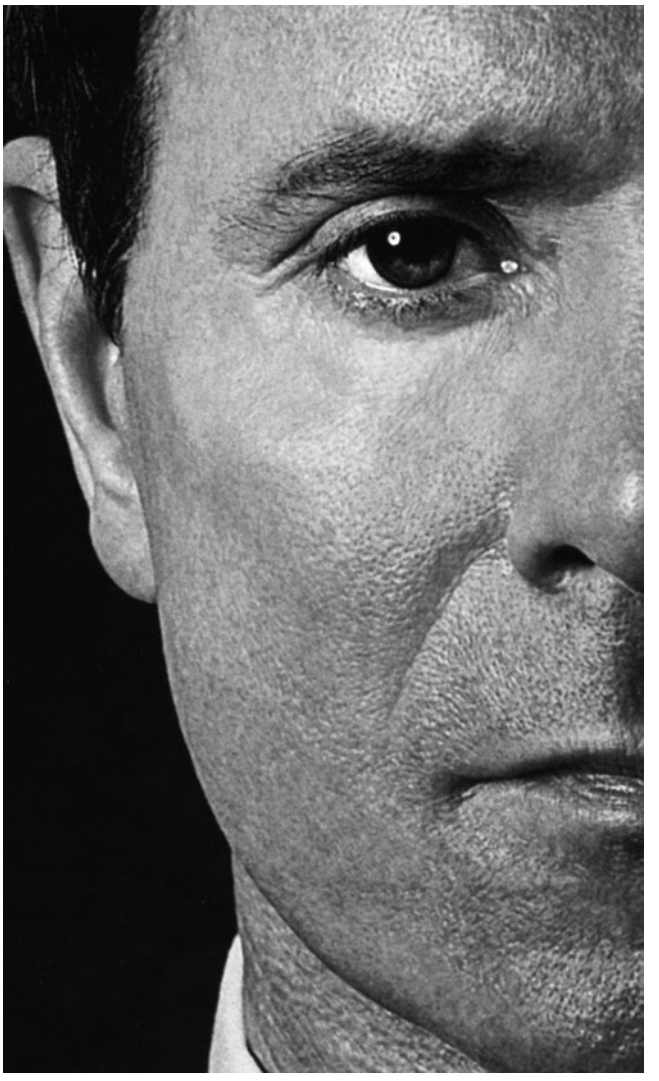


Figure 15. Richard (2001), Wanted, *official CD booklet*.

purity rather than guilt-laden sensual indulgence. The semantic proximity to Jesus is evident: he remained unmarried and is normally neither represented nor perceived as a sexually desiring or desirable being.

* * *

To conclude, I believe the signifiers that I have discussed in this article operate within the frame of a carefully constructed public image. The consistency of the pattern is noteworthy and may help to explain the devotion Cliff Richard's many fans have shown him for so long. The benevolence, apparent incorruptibility, and asexuality of his public image in combination with his lyric themes, certain habits of posture, and photographic tricks with light and with elevation, lead quite easily toward an interpretation of Richard as a redeemer figure. Each sign that I have focused upon bears its compelling meaning precisely because it is embedded in a

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well-crafted and consistent semantic pattern of performance and self-presentation whose similarity to Jesus and deliverance is difficult to ignore. In order to extend this study over the broader range of Richard's key signifiers, I am presently engaged in an analysis of the vocal resources and techniques applied in his songs. What interests me principally is how and to what extent these signifiers of redemption take a musical form. For this work I would like to invite comments from other musicologists.

Copyright acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. One article has been published in the *Journal of Popular Film and Television* by K.J. Donnelly, who analyses the first five musical films of Richard as a reflection of the recuperation of rock 'n' roll into the established structures of mainstream show business.
2. Donnelly (1998, p. 1).
3. *Guinness British Hit Singles*, http://www.britishhitsingles.com
4. 'Remember Me', 1987.
5. 'Let Me Be The One', 2001.
6. See <www.lyricstime.com>, <www.azlyrics.com>, <members.tripod.com/~Drdan2/lyrics/lyrics-lobby.html>, all 1 November 2005.
7. Interview with Yvonne M., conducted in May 2004.
8. It is equivocal though, who '*we*' is referring to. In accordance with my thesis it might well be the relationship between singer persona and listener which is said to have healing effects. At the same time, on a more abstract level, what could be referred to here might be the human being in general. In this case we might translate '*we*' as '*one*'.
9. 'Stronger Than That', 1989.
10. 'In The Country', 1967.
11. 'The Day That I Stop Loving You', 2004.
12. 'Whenever God Shines His Light On Me', 1989.
13. That they do not separate Cliff and Jesus so clearly in their actual listening practice was indicated by the statement of the fan above: 'So you see it from God's perspective – not Cliff's?' 'Yeah. Well, I think it changes. Part of the lyrics, like 'when the weight on your shoulders is too much to bear', I think that can flicker between that being Cliff and being friends. But the main lyric, that I relate to more, is about resting in God, and that's the bit I relate to more' (interview with Yvonne M., conducted in May 2004).
14. Jackson, Michael: intro on *History*, 1994.
15. These three are the only images from unofficial sources in this paper.
16. This term derives from Barthes' use in 'Rhetoric of the image', 1977.
17. Ferguson (1955, p. 56).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
19. Didron (1851, p. 268).
20. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
21. Ferguson (1955, p. 267).
22. Dick (2002, p. 57)
23. This term (short IOCM) was coined by Philip Tagg, and originally referred to 'pieces of music other than the analysis object which bear demonstrable sonic resemblance to (part or parts of) the analysis object' (http://tagg.org/articles/ptgloss.html#IOCM). I have been using the same method of interobjective comparison with regard to pictorial resemblances.
24. The setting of the final scene also bears resemblance to the spaceship in the film *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. The latter also unfolds a thematically comparable motif: Klaatu, the protagonist, acts as the Jesus-figure. Via spaceship he comes to earth, assuming the name Carpenter when he mingles with the crowd (Jesus, too, was a carpenter). Shortly after he is shot dead, he is resurrected. He delivers his message and leaves the earth, vanishing into his spaceship. It is this very sequence of which Jackson's finale in the Brit Awards stage show of 1996 is reminiscent.
25. <http://www.cliffrichard.org/associations/index.html>, 28 August 2004.
26. <www.cliffrichard.org/associations/index.html>, 5 September 2004.
27. <http://www.communitychannel.org/strands/features/show.php?id=235>, 28 August 2004.
28. 'Baby Hospital', Living TV, 17 May 2002, 9·30 a.m.

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29. In-depth interview with Maroulla S., May 2004.
30. See, for elaboration of this subject, Becker (1977).
31. 'The Day That I Stop Loving You', 2004.
32. He is known to be labelled the 'Peter Pan of Pop' by the British press: See *The Sun*, 26 November 1999, p. 46; 14 October 2000, p. 9; *TV Magazine*, 17 November 2001, p. 21.
33. Since the relationship with Sue Barker in the early 1980s he has not been known to have had another romantic engagement.

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