Litpop: Writing and Popular Music

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Writing and Popular Music: Litpop in / and / as the world

Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen

… if you're going to write songs and you really want to be a songwriter,

write the whole thing. Write the words and the music.

It's important to take English Literature and absorb as much poetry as you can.[1]

There is such a thing as society and it is through music

more than any other cultural activity that people become part of it.[2]

We don't make music – it makes *us*.[3]

Why Litpop?

Some of the contributions gathered here started out as presentations at the 2011 Litpop conference, and benefited from the exceptionally friendly and constructive environment it offered. Some of the ideas we explore in this introduction had similar foundations, but have also been shaped by what we have learned from and shared with participants in the Litpop bookclub and related workshops. Our experiences in these various settings have helped us develop and understand some key ideas underscoring *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music*. Before discussing the structure and content of the collection, we will consider these ideas, with a view to considering why we should think about them at all. This introduction therefore aims to establish what is at

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[1] Jimmy Webb, cited in T. Russell and S. Tyson (eds.), *And Then I Wrote: The Songwriter Speaks* (Vancouver, 1995), p. 185.

[2] Simon Frith, 'The Cultural Study of Popular Music', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (eds.), *Cultural Studies* (London, 1992), pp. 174–86, p. 177.

[3] David Byrne, *How Music Works* (Edinburgh and London, 2012), p. 155.

stake in thinking about the relationships expressed in litpop – that is, writing about or involving popular music – while surveying and evaluating some examples of recent resources for understanding these relationships.

In 1948, one great, politicised writer with an ear for popular song – W.H. Auden – wrote about another great, politicised writer with an ear for popular song – Shakespeare – while also writing about music and anyone who creates or enjoys it:

> Music is not only an art with its own laws and values; it is also a social fact. Composing, performing, listening to music are things which human beings do under certain circumstances just as they fight and make love.[4]

Auden touches on what makes music (popular or otherwise) matter to us, and to the writers he admires: it is 'social'. We might add to what Auden says here to suggest that writing and reading about music are also 'social' things we do under 'certain circumstances', as this collection, and its creation, attests.

Some scholars have been alive to Auden's insight. Lawrence Kramer began his hugely influential study of the interplay between poetry and classical music with a 'conviction' and 'intuition' about how he experienced both these things: 'the way I read certain poems was intimately bound up with the way I heard certain pieces of music'.[5] Since experiencing or intuiting this conviction confused any clear-cut distinctions between music and writing, Kramer started to explore 'the conditions in which such convergences appeared'.[6] Kramer contends that what makes these 'convergences' possible and comprehensible, for readers, writers, listeners or composers, is the 'cultural history' of the particular context where each one occurs: 'there is nothing necessary

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[4] W.H. Auden, *The Dyer's Hand* (1962; New York, 1989), p. 502.

[5] Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984), p. vii.

[6] Kramer, *Music and Poetry*, p. vii.

about it at any time'.[7] Understanding how music and writing are made and consumed and used means (and allows) understanding when, where, how and by whom they are made and consumed and used. In later work, Kramer encapsulates his arguments to echo Auden and affirm that when we read music and hear writing together, we situate both in and as history:

> Music is all too easy to treat as an Abstract Entity, something *in* but not *of* culture and history. … If so, we might say that the musicological goal of melopoetics [studying words and music] is to deidealise music without (entirely) disenchanting it. That goal is pursued by searching out deep structures and asking how they react to, intervene in, try to reinterpret, the cultural and historical conditions in which they are produced. … More generally, the imperative to interpret asks us to recognise that all music is in some sense texted music, music allied to the cultural activity of text-production.[8]

Other scholars offer equally potent understandings of music's relation to both texts and social and historical contexts. In his compelling account of the 'soundscape' – our 'sonic environment' – R. Murray Schafer insisted on the usefulness of 'accounts from literature and mythology' for establishing 'historical perspectives' on sound and hearing:

> The elaborate earwitness descriptions in works like the Bible and *The Thousand and One Nights* suggest that they were produced by societies in which sonological competence was highly developed. By comparison, the sonological competence of Western peoples today is weak.[9]

If we were to echo Schafer's downbeat cadences here, and perhaps dub in a little Theodor Adorno or Jacques Attali, we might suggest that litpop is part or indicative of the problems afflicting

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[7] Kramer, *Music and Poetry*, p. 15.

[8] Lawrence Kramer, 'Viewpoint: Dangerous Liaisons: The Literary Text in Musical Criticism', *19th-Century Music*, 13:2 (Autumn 1989): pp. 159–67, pp. 165–7.

[9] R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977; Rochester, Vermont, 1994), pp. 8, 274, 154.

soundscapes in alienated, repressive, mutilating modern society.[10] Alternatively, perhaps litpop helps us hear our world again, anew, increasing and attesting to our 'sonological competence'. To do this would be to fulfil Schafer's definition of the 'EARWITNESS': 'One who testifies or can testify to what he or she has heard'.[11] As Stephen Benson suggests, 'Fiction serves as an earwitness to the role of music in everyday life, a record of why, where and how music is made, heard and received'.[12] This phenomenon is exemplified in Colin Symes' discussion of literary responses to technology such as the gramophone, when he observes that musicians whose careers depended on such technologies were not best placed to reflect on their effects, 'perhaps because they were too close to their art'; novelists, however, 'were among the first cultural 'historians' to map the phonograph's destabilising impact on music'. [13] Symes suggests that as such technologies developed during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, so have our subjectivities and identities, and how we and others realise these, not least in fiction: 'Who would have imagined that there would be individuals who lived their whole lives around records? Well, novelists did'.[14] And so, in turn, did their readers. When we talk about popular music, then, we talk about the people who make such music and make such music popular: ourselves. This means that when we

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[10] See Theodor Adorno, 'On the Social Situation of Music' (1932) and 'On Popular Music' (1941), in *Essays on Music*, (ed.) Richard Leppert, trans. Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2002), pp. 391–436 and pp. 437–69; and Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Masumi (Minneapolis and London, 2003).

[11] Schafer, p. 272.

[12] Stephen Benson, *Literary Music in Contemporary Fiction* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 4.

[13] Colin Symes, 'From *Tomorrow's Eve* to *High Fidelity*: Novel Responses to the Gramophone in Twentieth Century Literature', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 193–206, p. 194.

[14] Symes, p. 204.

read and write about popular music, and when popular music invokes or is influenced by what people read and write, we are reading, writing, making and listening to accounts of who we are.

If writing can tell us about music's pasts, as Kramer and Schafer suggest, it can also inform our appreciation of music's present. The ethnographer Tia DeNora studied female listeners and music makers, and as she did, she positioned music consumption in social and political situations: 'it is probably impossible to speak of music's 'powers' abstracted from their contexts of use'. [15] DeNora's evidence is reinforced by the epigraphs with which this introduction began, and by philosophers like Jeanette Bicknell:

> Music's attraction and power over us … stems from its elemental social character. … Any so-called "private" experiences of music … carry a social meaning. … There is no such thing as "music itself" that can be experienced without reference to a context or shared social understandings. [16]

Equally, what DeNora recognises resonates with musicians writing about music, such as David Byrne:

> How music works, or doesn't work, is determined not just by what it is in isolation (if such a condition can ever be said to exist) but in large part by what surrounds it, where you hear it and when you hear it. [17]

One of the things that 'surrounds' and makes possible music (including popular music), and conditions how we experience what such music 'sounds like', is writing: 'the experience of music is nearly always inseparable from … other semiotic resources.' [18] The contexts of music's consumption matter, and these contexts include consumption in or through writing, language and words. Writing about music (popular or otherwise) helps us realise more fully the 'powers'

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[15] Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge, 2000), p. x.

[16] Jeanette Bicknell, *Why Music Moves Us* (Houndmills, 2009), pp. viii-ix.

[17] Byrne, p. 9.

[18] David Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters* (Chichester, 2013), p. 22.

DeNora identifies, enriching our sense of what such music means, and the sociopolitical contexts in which it means: 'Music is active within social life, it has 'effects', then, because it offers specific materials to which actors may turn when they engage in the work of organising social life. Music is a resource … for world building'.[19] Music helps people make sense of their worlds; it also helps us make (and remake) our worlds, actually or imaginatively. The proliferation of worlds built by writers discussed in this collection signals this: 'just as music's meaning may be constructed in relation to things outside it, so, too, things outside music [like novels or poems] may be constructed in relation to music'.[20] We might counter this point by noting that the ways many people consume modern music through its technologies can make music seem a very private, even an antisocial, experience.[21] Yet if listening to modern popular music appears a strangely isolating phenomenon, perhaps we can better understand what such music means to us, and to other people in the societies we make, when we read about it, and when we share what we read with others, in a book club, or a collection like this. Through the phenomenon of litpop, then, we understand ourselves. We can, of course, understand ourselves through music and through

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[19] DeNora, p. 44

[20] DeNora, p. 44

[21] See also Theodor Adorno, 'The Curves of the Needle' (1927/1965), *Essays on Music*, pp. 271–6; Evan Eisenberg, *The Recording Angel: Explorations in Phonography* (New York, 1987); Andrew Goodwin, 'Sample and Hold: Pop Music in the Digital Age of Reproduction', in Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (eds.), *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word* (London and New York, 1990), pp. 258–73; Paul du Gay et al. *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (London, 1997); Paul Théberge, ''Plugged in': Technology and Popular Music', in Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 3–25; and Michael Bull, *Sound Moves: iPod Culture and Urban Experience* (Abingdon and New York, 2007).

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writing separately. But all the ideas discussed so far suggest that our understanding intensifies when we combine or see the combinations of the two.

Litpop, Politics and Cultural 'Value'

We can further develop the arguments outlined above to recognise that when we invoke the term 'popular', in relation to music or anything else, we realise the social and political:

> The idea of the popular is often a way of constructing, categorising, and dismissing the cultural and social practices of 'ordinary' people. In other words, definitions of the popular are never neutral; they are always entangled with questions of culture and power.[22]

And so if we *do* relate 'popular' to 'music', issues of cultural value and political power intensify. This is because of the ways we make and consume music now: DeNora's study of the contexts of music's uses leads her to unequivocally affirm 'music's presence is clearly political, in every sense that the political can be conceived'.[23] But *popular* music – how it is made and consumed, what it expresses, and what we say about it – can be seen to exhibit an especially acute politicality:

> The alternative history of our time [can be] told from the standpoint of popular music, which is as good a position as any to look from, since pop, intersecting with issues of class, race and particularly gender, has been at the centre of post-war culture.[24]

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[22] John Storey, 'Popular', in Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg and Meaghan Morris (eds.), *New Keywords: A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 262–4, p. 264. For a recent critique of contemporary uses of the term 'popular', see Richard Middleton, 'Locating the People: Music and the Popular', in M. Clayton, T. Herbert and R. Middleton (eds.), *The Cultural Study of Music* (London, 2012), pp. 275–87.

[23] Byrne, p. 163.

[24] Hanif Kureishi, ''That's how good it was'', in Hanif Kureishi and Jon Savage (eds.), *The Faber Book of Pop* (London and Boston, 1995), pp. xvii-xx, p. xix.

Not everyone would agree with this. But thinking about popular music invites us to think about these 'issues'; moreover, thinking about writing and popular music complicates matters of power and culture because of the different cultural values – and powers – given to these different cultural forms. Hanif Kureishi begins his introduction to *The Faber Book of Pop* by noting how the American writer Tom Wolfe 'waited and waited' for the definitive, comprehensive, novelistic treatment of what had been going on in the United States 'since the mid-1960s'.[25] But the 'great literary fiction' and 'monsters of epic realism' Wolfe thought might be produced in or in response to 'this fervent period' just 'never happened'.[26] Kureishi, like Wolfe, asks 'Why not?' The answer, in part, is because 'most [North] American novelists and intellectuals … couldn't figure out what was happening', politically and aesthetically, in the cultures they sought to document: 'although these writers might listen to pop music and even dance to it … they wouldn't dream of writing about it'.[27] The contempt or incomprehension, suggests Kureishi, was mutual: 'pop wasn't interested in the kind of literature that Wolfe longed for'.[28] Kureishi builds on this observation to present the idea that 'pop is a form crying out not to be written about': 'It is physical, sensual, of the body rather than the mind, and in some ways it is anti-intellectual; let yourself go, don't think – feel'.[29]

But as an author who has himself evoked popular music's resonance, and as a co-editor of a vast and brilliant collection of writing all about pop, Kureishi is wisely unwilling to let such platitudes and assumptions go unchallenged. And so, in ways that relate to this collection's

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[25] Kureishi, p. xvii.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Kureishi, pp. xvii-xviii.

[28] Kureishi, p. xviii.

[29] Kureishi, p. xix.

concerns, he goes on to note that pop's 'progress' has been 'accompanied from the beginning by literary comment':

> Pop's first literary attendant was journalism, which to this day remains its acolyte and accomplice. … But pop also stimulated autobiography, the 'non-fiction novel', the fiction novel, personal journalism and many kinds of maverick forms. … Furthermore, pop provided writers with new areas to explore. … Pop … enlivened and altered the language, introducing a … proliferation of idioms, slang and fresh locutions.[30]

Three years after Kureishi made this point, Nicholas Cook would affirm: 'the word … has become the most irrepressible partner of music, whether in the form of record-sleeve essays, radio talks, or the now ubiquitous news-stand music magazines'.[31] We could take the long view when assessing the implications of Kureishi's and Cook's words here, and think of a range of synergies exemplifying litpop. Shakespeare's debt to, and impact on, music has generated a range of new insights about the relations between canonical literature and popular song, and between 'high' and 'popular' culture.[32] The extension of the concept of 'authorship' from literature to popular music has seen individual rock and pop artists singled out for attention. The ways artists and authors such as Nick Cave, Leonard Cohen and Lou Reed have used (and made) literary texts has

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[30] Kureishi, p. xix. For one account of life writing in or about rock music, see Thomas Swiss, 'That's Me in the Spotlight: rock autobiographies', in *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 287–94.

[31] Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford, 1998), p. 266.

[32] For some recent work on this see Stephen M. Buhler, 'Musical Shakespeares: attending to Ophelia, Juliet and Desdemona', in Robert Shaughnessy (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Popular Culture* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 150–74; Julie Sanders, *Shakespeare and Music: Afterlives and Borrowings* (Cambridge, 2007); and Adam Hansen, *Shakespeare and Popular Music* (London and New York, 2010).

interested literary scholars.[33] In this field, Bob Dylan continues to be the dominant figure, with his lyrics – if not his 1971 novel *Tarantula* – being related to a range of literary texts; indeed, to some contemporary poets ''He's the one''.[34] Much scholarship has looked at the influence of

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[33] For example, see Charlene Diehl-Jones, 'Re-membering the Love Song: Ambivalence and Cohen's 'Take This Waltz'', *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents, Reviews*, 33 (1993): 74–87; Stephen Rachman, 'Subterranean Homesick Poe: Lou Reed's The Raven', *Edgar Allan Poe Review*, 4:1 (2003): 28–41; and Nathan Wiseman-Trowse, 'Oedipus Wrecks: Cave and the Presley Myth', in Karen Welberry and Tanya Dalziell (eds.), *Cultural Seeds: Essays on the Work of Nick Cave* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 153–66.

[34] Denis Johnson, cited in David Wojahn, 'Like a Rolling Incognito Lounge: Rock and Roll and American Poetry' (1991), in Wojahn, *Strange Good Fortune: Essays on Contemporary Poetry* (Fayetteville, 2001), pp. 196–214, p. 210. On Dylan's influence on writing, see also Neil Corcoran (ed.), *Do You Mr Jones?: Bob Dylan with the Poets and Professors* (London, 2003). Writing about Dylan is extensive; for some examples of recent work on his literary influences, see Richard F. Thomas, 'The Streets of Rome: The Classical Dylan', *Oral Tradition*, 22:1 (2007): 30–56; David Yaffe, 'Bob Dylan and the Anglo-American Tradition', in Kevin J. H. Dettmar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan* (Cambridge, 2009), pp.15–27; Christopher Rollason, 'Tell-Tale Signs: Edgar Allan Poe and Bob Dylan: Towards a Model of Intertextuality', *Atlantis: Journal of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies*, 31:2 (2009): 41–56; Christopher Ricks, *Dylan's Visions of Sin* (Edinburgh, 2011); Nick Smart, 'She Might Be in Tangier: Bob Dylan and the Literary', in Nick Smart and Nina Goss (eds.), *Dylan at Play* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011), pp. 13–19; and Steve Clark and James Keery, ''Only the wings on his heels': Blake and Dylan', in Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly and Jason Whittaker (eds.), *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Literature* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp. 209–229.

particular literary movements on popular music. Clear connections can be made between the rock and pop sensibilities of individualism, poetry and protest, and the Romantic celebration of the visionary, the transgressive, folk idioms and marginal subjectivities. Accordingly, many literary critics have explored Romanticism's legacy in relation to a range of rock and pop artists.[35] Comparably, Modernist literary innovation emulates the abstraction and affect of music, popular and otherwise.[36] Other synergies are apparent in particular demographics or constituencies of musicians and writers. The 'Beats' or the 'Mersey Poets' have attracted popular and critical attention for the way they engage with popular music.[37] The recent publications of Paul

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[35] For example, see John P. McCombe, 'Not 'Only Sleeping': The Beatles and a Neo-Romantic Aesthetic of Indolence', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 44:2 (2011): 137–152; Tristanne Connolly, ''He Took a Face from the Ancient Gallery': Blake and Jim Morrison', in *Blake 2.0*, pp. 230–247; and David Fallon, ''Hear the Drunken Archangel Sing': Blakean Notes in 1990s Pop Music', in *Blake 2.0*, pp. 248–262.

[36] See, for example, Ruth H. Bauerle (ed.), *Picking Up Airs: Hearing the Music in Joyce's Text* (Urbana, 1993); T. Austin Graham, 'T. S. Eliot and Ubiquitous Music, 1909–1922', in Robert P. McParland (ed.), *Music and Literary Modernism: Critical Essays and Comparative Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2009), pp. 194–209; and Kim Moreland, 'Music in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Great Gatsby* as Music', in Michael J. Meyer (ed.), *Literature and Musical Adaptation* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 29–46.

[37] Fuller discussions of the Beats can be found in Lorenzo Thomas, ''Communicating by Horns': Jazz and Redemption in the Poetry of the Beats and the Black Arts Movement', *African American Review*, 26:2 (1992): 291–8; and David Hopkins, 'To Be or Not to Bop': Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* and the Culture of Bebop and Rhythm 'n' Blues', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 279–86. For an intimate and detailed account of the Mersey Poets, see Phil Bowen, *A Gallery to Play to: The Story of the Mersey Poets* (Liverpool, 2008).

Muldoon's *The Word on the Street: Rock Lyrics* and Morrissey's *Autobiography* remind us of the links between music and writing in, and musicians and writers of, the Irish diaspora.[38] Similarly, modern Irish poetry has many affinities with 'traditional' popular Irish music.[39] Particular musical genres, especially popular African-American forms like jazz or blues, have had huge impacts on literary practice in the Anglophone world and elsewhere, since the Harlem Renaissance in the early 1900s, and reaching into contemporary hip-hop.[40] This impact has been particularly evident

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[38] See Muldoon, *The Word on the Street: Rock Lyrics* (New York, 2013); as well as being a poet of transatlantic renown, Muldoon is a gigging and recording musician with the Wayside Shrines. On the influence of Brendan Behan on the Pogues, see Sean Campbell, *'Irish Blood, English Heart': Second Generation Irish Musicians in England* (Cork, 2011), pp. 27–32; on links between The Smiths, Shelagh Delaney and Oscar Wilde, see Campbell, pp. 115–17, 131–2; see also Morrissey, *Autobiography* (Harmondsworth, 2013). For broader cultural studies of The Smiths, see Sean Campbell and Colin Coulter (eds.), *Why Pamper Life's Complexities: Essays on the Smiths* (Manchester, 2010).

[39] See Dermot Kelly, 'James Joyce's Home Rule Comet, Elvis Costello's Anglo-Irish Agreement', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 2 (2007): 78–84; Séan Crosson, *'The Given note': Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry* (Newcastle, 2008). John Murphy, 'Horslips in Irish Musical and Literary Culture', *Estudios Irlandeses*, 3 (2008): 132–142; and Gerry Smyth, *Music in Irish Cultural History* (Dublin; Portland, OR, 2009).

[40] See, for example, the discussions in L. L. Dickson, ''Keep It in the Head': Jazz Elements in Modern Black American Poetry', *Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, 10:1 (1983): 29–37; Aldon Lynn Nielsen, *Black Chant: Languages of African-American Postmodernism* (Cambridge, 1997); B. J. Leggett, *Larkin's Blues: Jazz, Popular Music, and Poetry* (Baton Rouge, 1999); Jayne Bolden, 'All the Birds Sing Bass: The Revolutionary Blues of Jayne Cortez', *African American Review*, 35:1 (2001): 61–71; David Yaffe, *Fascinating Rhythm: Reading Jazz in American Writing* (Princeton, 2006); Laura Severin, 'Distant Resonances:

in certain authors, such as Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison or Amiri Baraka.[41] Similarly, novels such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) and Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992) incorporate oral traditions, music and storytelling, to recount cultural strategies of survival, resistance and subversion from the era of slavery through Reconstruction and segregation to the Civil Rights

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Contemporary Scottish Women Poets and African-American Music', *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 39:1 (2006): 45–59; Tony Bolden, 'Blue/Funk as Political Philosophy: The Poetry of Gil Scott-Heron', in Bolden (ed.), *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture* (New York, 2008), pp. 227–43; Jennifer D. Ryan, *Post-Jazz Poetics: A Social History* (New York, 2010); Rob Wallace, *Improvisation and the Making of American Literary Modernism* (New York, 2010); Meta DuEwa Jones, *The Muse is Music: Jazz Poetry from the Harlem Renaissance to Spoken Word* (Urbana, 2011); and Jean-Philippe Marcoux, *Jazz Griots: Music as History in the 1960s African American Poem* (Lanham, 2012).

[41] On Hughes, see, for example, Steven C. Tracy, *Langston Hughes and the Blues* (Chicago, 1988); Joanne V. Gabbin (ed.), *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry* (Charlottesville, 1999); Anita Patterson, 'Jazz, Realism, and the Modernist Lyric: The Poetry of Langston Hughes', *Modern Language Quarterly: A Journal of Literary History*, 61:4 (2000): 651–82; Michael Borshuk, ''Noisy Modernism': The Cultural Politics of Langston Hughes's Early Jazz Poetry', *Langston Hughes Review*, 17 (2002): 4–21; Felicia M. Miyakawa, ''Jazz at Night and the Classics in the Morning'': Musical Double-Consciousness in Short Fiction by Langston Hughes', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 273–78; and John Edgar Tidwell and Cheryl R. Ragar (eds.), *Montage of a Dream: The Art and Life of Langston Hughes* (Columbia, 2007). On Baraka, see, for instance, Farah Jasmine Griffin, 'Baraka's Billie Holiday as a Blues Poet of Black Longing', *African American Review*, 37:2–3 (2003): 313–20; and Kathy Lou Schultz, 'Amiri Baraka's Wise Why's Y's: Lineages of the Afro-Modernist Epic', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 35:3 (2012): 25–50.

movement and after, thereby relating the conflicts and identities now comprising the African diaspora.[42]

Critical attention has developed alongside these creative synergies.[43] Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin's influential collection *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word* (1990)

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[42] On Ellison and music, recent work includes Kevin Bell, 'The Embrace of Entropy: Ralph Ellison and the Freedom Principle of Jazz Invisible', *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture*, 30:2 (2003): 21–45; Michael Magee, 'Ralph Ellison: Pragmatism, Jazz and the American Vernacular', *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society: A Quarterly Journal in American Philosophy*, 39:2 (2003): 227–58; and Michael Borshuk, ''So Black, So Blue': Ralph Ellison, Louis Armstrong and the Bebop Aesthetic', *Genre: Forms of Discourse and Culture*, 37:2 (2004): 261–84; Paul Allen Anderson, 'Ralph Ellison on Lyricism and Swing', *American Literary History*, 17:2 (2005): 280–306; and Stephen Barker, 'The Blues as Replacement Model of the Universe in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*', *Sigma Tau Delta Review*, 8 (2011): 40–49. On Morrison and music, recent work includes Barbara Williams Lewis, 'The Function of Jazz in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*', in David L. Middleton (ed.), *Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism* (New York, 1997), pp. 271–82; Jürgen E. Grandt, 'Kinds of Blue: Toni Morrison, Hans Janowitz, and the Jazz Aesthetic', *African American Review*, 38:2 (2004): 303–22; Andrew Scheiber, 'Jazz and the Future Blues: Toni Morrison's Urban Folk Zone', *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 52:2 (2006): 470–94; and Leila Hejaiej, 'Toni Morrison's Jazz: Bridging the Gap between Music and Fiction', in Najma Al Zidjaly (ed.), *Building Bridges: Integrating Language, Linguistics, Literature, and Translation in English Studies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2012), pp. 223–32.

[43] In addition to the texts mentioned here, notable contributions to the field include David Sanjek, 'The Bloody Heart of Rock 'n' Roll: Images of Popular Music in Contemporary Speculative Fiction', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 28:4 (1995): 179–209; Walter Bernhart, Steven Paul Scher, and Werner Wolf (eds), *Word and Music Studies: Defining the Field*

anthologised key writings on popular music from 1950 onwards, and established key contexts for the study of popular music including subculture studies, semiotics, and gender and sexuality. Stephen Benson's *Literary Music: Writing Music in Contemporary Fiction* (2006) examined the representation of 'Western art music' in novels by authors including J.M Coetzee, Ian McEwan, Kazuo Ishiguro and Jeanette Winterson. While Benson's monograph was not on popular music, it identified the relationship between music and fiction as key motif in contemporary literary studies. Two years later, Gerry Smyth's *Music in Contemporary British Fiction: Listening to the Novel* provided a historical survey of the relationships between music and the novel. More specifically, it examined the emergence of the 'music-novel' as a significant literary genre in recent years, exploring texts by many of the authors mentioned here, and other notable works such as Suhayl Saadi's 2004 *Psychoraag*. Since Smyth's monograph, a range of compelling litpop novels have been published, including Jennifer Egan's *A Visit from the Goon Squad* (2010), Dana Spiotta's *Stone Arabia* (2012), and Michael Chabon's *Telegraph Avenue* (2012). Though *Litpop* does not address such texts directly, we hope it will contribute to the critical debates these creative works have begun to stimulate.

However, scholarship has shown that is not only in the novel that the creative synergy between words and music resides. Steve Jones's 2002 collection, *Pop Music and the Press*, explores the institutions, histories and discourses of English language popular music criticism since the 1950s, with a particular focus on the legacy of the New Journalism and the changing

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(Amsterdam, 1999); Werner Wolf, *The Musicalization of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (Amsterdam, 1999); Michael J. Meyer (ed.), *Literature and Musical Adaptation* (Amsterdam, 2002); Kenneth Womack and Todd F. Davis, (eds.), *Reading the Beatles: Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism, and the Fab Four* (Albany, 2006); David Nicholls, 'Narrative Theory as an Analytical Tool in the Study of Popular Music Texts', *Music & Letters*, 88:2 (2007): 297–315; and Drago Momcilovic (ed.), *Resounding Pasts: Essays in Literature, Popular Music, and Cultural Memory* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2011).

relationship between music journalism, the music industry and the media.[44] Many critics have commented on the relative neglect of pop and rock journalism in academia, where what Jason Toynbee calls the 'para-pedagogic work of the rock press' (that is, such journalism's urge or ability to teach readers), is often both an enabling condition and an unacknowledged origin.[45] By providing some invaluable historical and critical frameworks this volume redresses this neglect. An interest in issues of 'textuality' beyond the literary is also explored in *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular* (2000).[46] This represented a significant turn in popular music studies by gathering together key writings within the 'new musicology' distinguished by a renewed concerned with the textual; as such it makes a key contribution to the ongoing development of the field we consider here by offering new methodologies for the analysis of music, lyrics and performance.

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[44] Steve Jones (ed.), *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadephia, 2002).

[45] Jason Toynbee, 'Policing Bohemia, Pinning up Grunge: the Music Press and Generic Change in British Pop and Rock', *Popular Music* 12:3 (1993): 289–300, p. 289. See also Steve Jones, 'Re-viewing Rock Writing: The Origins of Popular Music Criticism', *American Journalism* (Winter-Spring 1992): 87–107; David Sanjek, 'Pleasure and principles: Issues of Authenticity in the Analysis of Rock 'n' Roll', *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 4:2 (1992): 12–21; Eamonn Forde, 'From Polyglottism to randing: on the Decline of Personality Journalism in the British Music Press', *Journalism*, 2:1 (2001): 23–43; Chris Atton, 'Writing about Listening: Alternative Discourses in Rock Journalism', *Popular Music*, 28:1 (2009): 53–67; and Ulf Lindberg, Gestur Guðmundsson, Morten Michelsen, and Hans Weisethaunet, *Rock Criticism from the Beginning: Amusers, Bruisers, and Cool-Headed Cruisers* (New York, 2011).

[46] Richard Middleton, *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular* (Oxford, New York, 2000).

Like an increasing number of scholars, writers and musicians, then, we would share Kureishi and others' passion for and belief in the power and significance of pop's relationships with writing, in all their diverse sociocultural forms. By paying attention to these diverse and dynamic relationships we change not only our understanding of the relations between different forms of culture; we also alter understandings of how those different forms are valued. To see how this happens, we might revisit *The Faber Book of Pop*. Kureishi's co-editor for that collection, Jon Savage, echoes the point about the supposed or real separation of pop and writing: 'In our literary culture, we barely have words for the physical, emotional and physiological impact of music on our bodies'.[47] Yet like Kureishi, Savage both acknowledges and complicates this separation, because of what is at stake if we do not:

> Since the mid-seventies, the New Right has launched a successful counter-attack against the sixties, and thus, by direct implication, pop. One result, in Britain at least, has been the renewal of an obsolete hierarchy of values … which unquestionably states that the novel is the highest form of artistic endeavour, and that pop is, like the girl in '96 Tears', put 'way down here'.[48]

What rang true in 1995, when Savage wrote this, resonates even louder now. Whatever we think about (certain types of) writing and popular music, together or apart, we also think about their value, together or apart. In terms of value, then, are writing (literary or otherwise) and popular music different and unequal, or different but equal, or not so different after all? The relationship between and relative values of 'literary' writing and popular music perplexes and animates even those, like the esteemed American music journalist Robert Christgau, who are keenly aware and appreciative of both:

> It would be perverse to argue that [Chuck Berry's] songs are in themselves as rich as [Marcel Proust's] Remembrance of Things Past. Their richness is a

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[47] Jon Savage, 'The Simple Things You See are all Complicated', in *The Faber Book of Pop*, pp. xxi-xxxiii, p. xxiv.

[48] Savage, p. xxxii.

> function of their active relationship with an audience – a complex relationship
> that shifts for every perceiver every time a song enters a new context, club or
> album or radio or mass sing-along. Proust wrote about a dying subculture from
> a cork-lined room. Berry helped give life to a subculture.[49]

According to this perspective, a popular song's 'richness' lies not in some inherent significance, but in what its consumers and users do with it – how they make it popular. Proust's writing, however, is accorded an inherent worth precisely because it is alienated from the 'dying subculture' it depicts. Though this perspective grants popular music 'richness', it is not comparable to literature's 'richness'. It is hard to say if this means popular music and literature are different, equal, or unequal.

Issues of value and difference in the relationships between writing and music have attracted the attention of one of popular music's greatest commentators and sociologically minded analysts, Simon Frith. In 1987, Frith published 'Why do songs have words?'. Significantly, given the key terms of its title, this chapter begins with a discussion of Radclyffe Hall and ends quoting Proust. As its form integrates analysis of popular music and literary writing, so its content eloquently explodes some of the ideological assumptions behind debates about 'lit' and 'pop', 'rock' and 'pop' and 'value':

> Unless acts claim specifically to *be* poets (like some Jamaican dub performers
> or a relatively arty New York act like the Last Poets) they are not heard to write
> poetry, and rock fans have always gone along with the idea that 'naturally'
> realistic forms (folk, blues, soul, rap) have to be distinguished from 'art' forms,
> which are 'original', elaborate, and rooted in personal vision and control. From
> the start, rock's claim to a superior pop status rested on the argument that rock
> songwriters … were, indeed, poets. … Rock 'poets' are recognised by a
> particular sort of self-consciousness; their status rests not on their approach to

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[49] Robert Christgau, cited in Lindberg et al., p.153.

> words but on the type of words they use; rock poetry is a matter of planting poetic clues.[50]

Frith has no time for fetishising platitudes or divisive prejudices, though: he laments the existence of 'pompous rock anthologies' like Richard Goldstein's *The Poetry of Rock* (1969), and criticises the idea that Bob Dylan (and his successors) can or should be perceived as a better poet than The Four Tops: 'Rock "poetry" opened up possibilities of lyrical banality of which Tin Pan Alley had never even dreamt, but for observing academics it seemed to suggest a new pop seriousness'.[51] Yet Frith remains able to accept why these designations and discriminations matter to people, and so why it matters to think about words and music together:

> People may not listen to most pop songs as 'messages' … and the average pop lyric may have none of the qualities of rock realism or poetry, but the biggest-selling music magazine in Britain by far is still [in 1987] *Smash Hits*, a picture paper organised around the words of the latest chart entries, and so the question remains: why and how do song words (banal words, unreal words, routine words) work?[52]

Frith's intervention in these debates is vital. This is because he, like Kureishi and Savage, exposes some of the rancid prejudices inciting discussions of 'value', but also because, like them, he foregrounds the role of real 'people', with real desires, fantasies and failings, in making popular music, and writing on or about it.

For our part, then, we do not think it is possible or desirable to see writing ('literary' and otherwise) and popular music as absolutely different, for all their formal, aesthetic and historic distinctiveness, and for all the differences in when and how they are made and enjoyed. History and art, and what we make of them, are too complicated for that: while we know Shakespeare

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[50] Simon Frith, 'Why do songs have words?', in Avron Levine White (ed.), *Lost in Music: Culture, Style and the Musical Event* (London and New York, 1987), pp. 77- 106, pp. 92–3.

[51] Frith, 'Why', pp. 92–3.

[52] Frith, 'Why', p. 97.

never heard Bob Dylan, we also know a literary critic like Christopher Ricks hears Shakespeare as 'Dylanesque'.[53] In turn, we do not think it is possible or desirable to ascribe greater cultural value to either writing or popular music, though we understand how and why others have done so. If, as the chapters in this collection attest, writing and popular music are related, historically, formally, aesthetically, one cannot and should not easily be separated from or privileged over another. We would contend this means that it is neither desirable nor possible to privilege the consumers of or audiences for either writing or popular music over each other. We have learned from our own lives as listeners, readers and scholars, and our experiences in the book club, and from contributions to this collection, that plenty of people are insightful consumers or creators of both, and acutely conscious of their own situatedness in history and society as they consume and create.

Litpop: Words and Music

In their introduction to the 2005 special issue of *Popular Music* dedicated to 'Literature and Music', Sara Cohen and John Street suggest that the 'common elements between the study of music and literature' have 'generated relatively little dialogue'.[54] Two years earlier, Dai Griffiths proposed that 'for musicologists words are alien territory', going so far as to suggest that 'poetry tends to be the dirty word of this subject-area'.[55] Indeed the concern with a methodological paradox or impasse recurs in discussions of the relationship between the written word and music. Many critics feel compelled to concede that music possesses a quality which is irreducible to language, before proceeding to explore the relationship between words and music. Right at the

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[53] Ricks, *Dylan's Visions of Sin*, p. 60.

[54] Sara Cohen and John Street, 'Introduction to 'Literature and Music' Special Issue', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 163–4.

[55] Griffiths, 'From Lyric to Anti-Lyric: Analyzing the Words in Pop Song', in Allan F. Moore (ed.), *Analyzing Popular Music* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 39–59, pp. 40–41.

start of his discussion about the place of music in contemporary fiction, Stephen Benson makes a comment that seems to make such discussion both impossible and essential:

> We listen without thinking, and yet asked to explain the sounds themselves – to describe what we hear – many of us flounder. We pass from the felt immediacy of the musical experience to the seeming inadequacy of our ability to put that experience into words.[56]

This is an honest admission for a book that takes up the challenge of putting musical experience into words, and exploring how others do so. Comparably, while David Lindley observes the 'proposition' that 'some kind of relationship exists between the arts of music and literature' has long been 'unquestioned', he also seems to suggest that literature and music are separate, for their makers and users: 'though the arts may co-operate in particular instances, they remain always essentially distinct'.[57] Indeed in his comprehensive study of the role of music in the contemporary British novel, Gerry Smyth suggests that the particular appeal of music to the novelist may reside in its 'ability to invoke states of consciousness that are beyond the ability of language to render'.[58] Smyth and others recognise that this privileging of music as a peculiarly 'pure' or 'absolute' aesthetic form has its origins in the nineteenth century, and more specifically, in the legacy of German Romanticism. Smyth goes on to suggest that from such a perspective, 'music itself represents, stands for, the ineffable that subsists outwith language'.[59]

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[56] Benson, *Literary Music*, p. 1.

[57] David Lindley, 'Literature and Music', in Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall, and John Peck (eds.), *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* (London, 1991), pp. 1004–14.

[58] Gerry Smyth, *Music in Contemporary British Fiction: Listening to the Novel* (London, 2008), p. 25.

[59] Smyth, *Music in Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 42.

However, in the face of this sublime ineffability there exists the indisputable evidence of a wealth of writing on or about music. The 'words and music' formulation is perhaps a rather formalist one, and seems to situate two discrete art forms in a relationship which is fundamentally supplementary in nature: words seek to capture the essence of music, and music seeks to express the power of words. Formalist or not, as Kureishi and Cook suggested above, far from reducing language to silence, music has inspired an incredible proliferation of writing. So how do we talk about what music means to us? How might we capture and share what music does? Music itself can't do that. At the very least, we need words to make sense of it, or so says a musician:

> Music … tells us how other people view the world – people we have never met, sometimes people who are no longer alive – and it tells it in a non-descriptive way. Music *embodies* the way those people think and feel: we enter into new worlds – their worlds – and … encountering them can be completely transformative. … Something about music urges us to engage with its larger context, beyond the piece of plastic it came on.[60]

As these affirmations suggest, for David Byrne, songwriter, musician and author of *How Music Works* (2012), writing is part of those 'worlds' and that 'context', though, for Byrne, it is not especially privileged, and placed alongside forms of culture of many kinds and locations. His book cites T.S. Eliot next to descriptions of making protest-song lyrics from 'an Egyptian poem dating back thousands of years – a cry against violence and alienation', during ongoing Anglo-American aggressions since the events of 11 September 2001.[61] His creative and critical practice is prefigured by scholars like Cook, who describes music's contexts like this:

> Meaning lies not in musical sound … nor in the media with which it is aligned, but in the encounter between them. … Musical cultures are not simply cultures of sounds, nor simply cultures of representations of sounds, but cultures of the relationship between sound and representation. The cohabitation and

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[60] Byrne, pp. 94, 211.

[61] Byrne, pp. 178–80.

> confrontation of different media are inscribed within the practice of Western classical music (and perhaps of all music), in the relationship of sound and notation, and in the relationship between music and verbal discourse. … Words do not transparently represent meanings that already exist in the music, but instead contribute to the emergence of meaning.[62]

Cook's concept of 'musical cultures' is invaluable for this volume. For, like Cook, we aim to think beyond the frame of 'words about music' and 'music about words', and instead to contribute to a different way of conceiving the relationship between words and music. Thinking like this might question assumptions about the 'irreducibility' of any art form and may acknowledge a relationship which is reciprocal and interactive in nature. Cook observes that 'there is something extraordinary about the sheer extent of literature on music'; if this seems paradoxical it need not:

> The apparent paradox disappears if we see words as not trying to duplicate or substitute for the music, but as complementing it, resulting in a counterpoint between word and music, denotation and connotation. [63]

When we see writing and music like this, we might 'blur, and perhaps … erase', distinctions between 'music and its interpretation', creating and consuming; we might also see the 'constitutive role of interpretation, and more specifically, of verbal interpretation', in 'musical culture'.[64] Indeed, while the written word is a key concern for this collection it is understood as an integral element within a broader musical culture which encompasses creative practices of production, consumption and reception, practices which have material, ideological, discursive and subjective dimensions.

Litpop: Meanings and Methods

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[62] Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 270.

[63] Cook p. 23.

[64] Cook p. 23. Cook's broader thesis is to question the concept of 'music alone' as represented in Peter Kivy's *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca, 1991).

Gerry Smyth wryly comments that 'nomenclature … bedevils all interdisciplinary projects'.[65] Interdisciplinarity is difficult to define and this is only fitting given its central concern with interrogating how and why knowledge is produced and organised. For some, integrating disciplinary methodologies to form a new field of study represents the goal of interdisciplinary work. For others, the value of bringing together more than one discipline to analyse a common object lies in the production of new insights, not only into the object of study but also into the nature of disciplinary methods and practices.[66]

With this in mind, and as a prelude to discussing our own interdisciplinary project, the title of this volume merits some reflection. At its simplest litpop was a handy compound intended to integrate two key concerns of this collection: writing and popular music. Litpop has acted as the title of an international interdisciplinary conference, a public book club, an online blog and social media site – and now an edited collection of academic essays. As such it has been a 'brand' for a range of scholarly and cultural activities encompassing academic and public audiences; as our appointed envoy, litpop was tasked with hailing those with a shared interest in reading and music and to enlist them in dialogue and debate. For all its economy, we are nevertheless conscious that litpop is a term which potentially hosts a range of intertextual meanings, some inadvertent.

This collection is concerned with a broad spectrum of writing including literary and popular fiction, poetry and lyrics, and rock and pop journalism and extending to the creative and industrial uses of the graphic arts. The 'lit' of the title is not intended to limit discussion to the 'literary' arts as conventionally defined but does serve to flag an interest in the uses to which the 'literary' is put in popular music cultures. Similarly, this collection explores a wide range of popular musics, from music hall to post-punk to Afrobeat. The 'pop' of the title is intended to

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[65] Smyth, *Music in Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 9.

[66] See Joe Moran, *Interdisciplinarity* (London and New York, 2010) p. 167.

refer to popular music broadly defined, rather than pop as a specific genre; accordingly, a number of contributions explore the construction of genre, audience, and market, and music's implication in the politics of race, class, gender and sexuality. Finally, it is worth acknowledging that the title of this collection probably betrays its national provenance. It was not our declared intention for *Litpop* to evoke the memory of Britpop – and certainly not to mobilise Britpop's aspirations and limitations as defining our concerns (quite the contrary). But a degree of ironic appropriation of 'Britpop' was at work in this allusion to this much discussed 'renaissance' in British rock and pop music in the mid 1990s.[67] A classic instance of rock journalism shorthand, Britpop was co-opted by a broader cultural brand – 'Cool Britannia' – which incorporated the 'Britart' of the 'Young British Artists'. Moreover, 1995 saw the publication of Nick Hornby's novel *High Fidelity*, a title often seen as the literary counterpart to the Britpop phenomenon.[68] The reception of *High Fidelity* arguably reinforced a widespread assumption that the consumption and 'expert' appreciation of rock and pop music is a white, male, middle-class prerogative. Hornby's novel was, of course, not the first to explore the role of popular musical in the construction of identity. Before Hornby,

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[67] The most lucid and impassioned recent explication of this entirely justified alienation, which considers the long shadow cast by Britpop, is Rhian E. Jones' *Clampdown: Pop-Cultural Wars on Class and Gender* (Winchester and Washington, 2013). See also Peter Bennett, 'Britpop and National Identity', *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, 5:1 (1998): 13–25; and John Harris, *The Last Party: Britpop, Blair and the Demise of British Rock* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003).

[68] See Roy Shuker, 'Beyond the 'high fidelity' stereotype: defining the (contemporary) record collector', *Popular Music* 23:3 (2004): 311–30; Mikko Keskinen, 'Single, Long-Playing, and Compilation: The Formats of Audio and Amorousness in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction,* 41:1 (2005): 3–21; and Barry J. Faulk, 'Love and Lists in Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*', *Cultural Critique*, 66 (2007): 153–76.

questions of ethnicity, class and colonialism were foregrounded in Roddy Doyle's 1987 novel *The Commitments*; class, religion and 'national' identity were problematised in Gordon Legge's 1989 *The Shoe*; and Hanif Kureishi's 1990 novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* similarly queried nationality, while also using rock and pop performance as metaphors for the complexity and ambiguity of gender and sexuality identities. The relationship between popular music and other cultural forms exemplified in the Britpop phenomenon is suggestive of a number of topics pertinent to this volume. These include: the close connections between popular music, contemporary art and literary fiction; the gendered, racial and class politics of popular music; and the tensions between popular music as an expressive culture and as a cultural industry. If litpop evokes Britpop, it does so self-consciously and critically; this allusion is not intended to delimit the national or generic concerns of the collection but rather it is hoped that it might raise questions about the historical and cultural forces at play in how litpop can be defined. Moreover, it may be argued that litpop – as conceived in this volume – has a stronger affinity with another conceptual compound: 'artpop'.

In *Art into Pop*, Simon Frith and Howard Horne influentially traced the 'extraordinary international impact of British music since the Beatles', back to the impact of the unique British art school tradition.[69] While the scope of this study was not limited to the post-1960s art school pop and rock tradition, the sensibility which Frith and Horne described informs a number of contributions to this collection – namely, those which focus on the innovative, experimental and even avant-garde practices employed not only in pop and rock lyrics but also in the music writing authored by artists, fans and journalists. As Neil Nehrig puts it, the 'bohemians and former art-

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[69] Simon Frith and Howard Horne, *Art into Pop* (London and New York), p. 1.

school radicals' of this particular genealogy 'understood that literary language … can set up a noise that refuses authority'.[70]

While complicating problematic assumptions, this collection also seeks to extend current scholarship both in terms of scope and in terms of method. Questions of methodology are indeed pressing when approaching the topic of writing and popular music, and when bringing together critical approaches from the fields of popular music studies and literary studies. Considering this lively border traffic creates a shared set of concerns, including, but not limited to, the following: the nature of textuality, reading and interpretation; the uses and meaning of the 'literary' in popular music, especially in relation to concepts of authorship and narrative; an expanded understanding of the scope and reach of the cultures of popular music; a questioning of the boundaries between literature and popular culture, between visual and performing arts practice and popular music, and between the academy and the culture of which it is a part; and a questioning of the boundaries between different kinds of writing (academic, journalistic, literary, creative) and different kinds of author (scholar, critic, artist, fan).

This collection is not principally concerned with critiquing existing approaches to the topic of writing and popular music nor with producing a new integrated methodology, but rather with facilitating dialogue across and between disciplines – disciplines whose own histories and identities owe much to the impact of interdisciplinary endeavour. Theoretical frameworks – such as cultural studies, structuralism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, feminism and queer theory – have helped reshape contemporary literary and popular music studies. The competing claims of form and context, text and history, aesthetics and politics continue to enliven debates about the history and future of both disciplines. Gerry Smyth suggests 'radical changes within the parent disciplines of musicology and literary criticism' were 'especially significant' to the 'study of the

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[70] Neil Nehring, 'The Shifting Relations of Literature and Popular Music in Postwar England', *Discourse Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, 12:1 (1989), p. 96.

music / literature nexus', and vice versa, we might add.[71] In a sense, this collection can be seen as one way to conceptualise an object of study – an object not exclusively possessed by any single discipline and whose analysis is illuminated by a range of methodological approaches. The rock lyric and the pop music novel have been the traditional focus of the analysis of the relationship between literature and popular music and are of equal interest in this collection; however, these forms are placed within a continuum of the textual, the graphic and the literary within popular music culture.

Litpop: Writing and Popular Music – An Overview

Throughout the conference and all the other activities we have undertaken as part of the litpop project, a seemingly simple question has been at the heart of what we do: what happens when writing and popular music meet? This question informs this collection and animates this introduction. And as we have tried to answer this question, in this introduction and elsewhere, we have realised it generates others, which underscore the structure of *Litpop*. Through original, interdisciplinary, tightly-focussed and strongly-theorised case studies, our contributors convey how musicians have thought about themselves in terms of the 'literary' or writerly, and how novels, poetry, biographies, zines, interviews, or journalism represent and reflect pop music's histories and mythologies, and the identities of fans, musicians or performers. To help conceptualise how these interrelations might work, the collection is divided into three sections, each with their own distinct lines of enquiry, and each manifesting the book's key themes: 'Making Litpop', 'Thinking Litpop', and 'Consuming Litpop'. 'Making Litpop' explores the ways in which hybrids of writing and popular music have been created by musicians and authors. 'Thinking Litpop' considers what critical or intellectual frameworks can be used to understand these hybrid cultural forms. Finally, 'Consuming Litpop' examines the ways in which writers deal with music's influence, the ways musicians engage with literary texts, and the ways audiences of

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[71] Smyth, *Music in Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 4.

music *and* writing understand their own role in making litpop happen. Answering the questions asked in these sections is not easy, and is certainly beyond the capacities of this introduction and the collection it prefaces. Moreover, as this introduction proves, because these questions are challenging and require complex answers, we are not the first, in either the critical or creative sphere, to consider them or their variants. So as we explain how our contributors address the questions they do, we and our contributors have tried to integrate any explanations with the existing critical heritage.

The first section asks these questions: How have 'literary' texts appropriated the sounds and idioms of popular music? How have popular musicians invoked 'literary' texts, imagery and motifs in their work? How does writing construct or represent popular music cultures (makers, musicians, fans, collectors, consumers, users, subcultures), industries (performers, moguls, producers), or histories and mythologies (through nostalgia, pastiche and memory)? What happens when a popular musician becomes a novelist or poet (or vice versa)? The contributors in this section address these questions in various ways. In ~~''A Burlesque of Art': *Three Men in a Boat* and Music Hall'~~ '"A Burlesque of Art": *Three Men in a Boat*, Music Hall and the Imperial Mimicry of the Victorian Urban Explorer', David Ibitson looks at an incarnation of popular music in an earlier era of mass culture. He situates literary representations of making and consuming popular music in the case of nineteenth-century London music hall in the widest contexts, correlating the local and metropolitan, and the global and the imperial. Ibitson shows how, in Jerome K. Jerome's 1889 novel and the discourses it parodies, popular music emerges as a complex signifier, a source of salvation, sexuality, and sadness. Moreover, Ibitson argues that the parodic vitality of Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* is informed by the subversive potentials of contemporary popular music. Continuing a nineteenth-century focus, to move beyond it, in 'You can't just say "words"': Literature and Nonsense in the Work of Robert Wyatt', Richard Elliott discusses how Robert Wyatt sees himself as a musician operating within both popular and progressive traditions, while making links with wide-ranging literary influences, which are at

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once also both progressive (Oulipo) and popular (Lewis Carroll). Elliot explores how not only Wyatt's music, but also many other examples of popular music, are informed by and expressive of 'literary' cultures, where the 'literary' is understand as a self-conscious play with the sense, and nonsense, conveyed through words. In ~~'Sarah Records, 1987–1995: A Perfect Pop Story'~~ 'Perfect Pop Story: Sarah Records (1987–1995)', Elodie Roy considers acts of writing and storytelling as ways of creating narratives for the production and consumption of popular music in the UK in the 1980s. The narratives, generated by the independent label Sarah Records, were actually counter-narratives involving popular music as resistance to prevailing attitudes and hegemonies. This is writing as rewriting, remaking, and re-hearing realities. Roy's account of the 'life-story' of a record label reminds us that any written account of music realises the way writing and music condition each other, and our appraisal of them. Gerard Moorey's chapter, '""~~Fate Songs": Pop Music and the Picaresque in D.B.C. Pierre's *Vernon God Little*~~'Fate Songs": Musical Agency and the Literary Soundtrack in D.B.C. Pierre's *Vernon God Little*', helps develop our understanding of the role of popular music in the construction of literary subjectivity. Moorey situates a detailed analysis of one novel, D.B.C Pierre's *Vernon God Little* (2003), in a history of the novel, and in relation to cultural changes manifested by media such as recorded sound. *Vernon God Little*'s picaresque roots (and routes) and 'literary soundtrack' explore models and representations of selfhood and identity in an age of the mechanical reproduction and digital consumption of music. In turn, Julia Downes reflects upon the material conditions of making words and music in a genre of music and a cultural moment profoundly concerned with subjective identity and collective agency. In '",'"~~Turning cursive letters into knives": word, sound and action in riot grrrl resistance'~~We are turning cursive letters into knives": The Synthesis of the Written Word, Sound and Action in Riot Grrrl Cultural Resistance', Downes draws on extensive archival research and oral histories, to unpick closely textured relationships between words and music in the genesis, history and legacy of the punk-infused movement known as riot

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grrrl.[72] Downes shows how writing in zines and letters (and on bodies), was both superseded and augmented by making music.

The next section, 'Thinking Litpop', develops themes and positions from the first five chapters, to ask: what critical frameworks or paradigms help us analyse the interactions between popular music and fiction or non-fiction? What are the relationships between genres of popular music and types of 'literary' writing? Are music criticism, journalism and biography 'literary'? Can we speak of a 'narratology' of music biography, music journalism, fanzines or fan fiction? In 'Populating and Popularising the Quality Press: Pop's New Voices in the English Broadsheet, 1985–1990Defining Qualities: Making a Voice for Rock and Pop Music in the English Quality News Press', Jennifer Skellington opens this debate with a case study and micro-history of the cultural and socioeconomic conditions informing a vital type of writing about music: journalism. Drawing on discourse analysis and interview materials, she suggests that the sort of writing about music that is possible, and the specific linguistic forms it takes at particular times, can be seen to respond to the circumstances in which that writing (and its musical subjects) are produced, consumed and used. This is an important but thus far under-researched area, even, or especially, by music journalists themselves. Paul Morley's *Words and Music* (2003) certainly contains lots of words, many discussing music, but few address how the two relate, beyond Morley briefly citing his debt to writers 'with style and attitude'.[73] In his chapter 'Trauma and

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[72] Downes' work might be read usefully alongside Christine Henseler and Randolph D. Pope (eds.), *Generation X Rocks: Contemporary Peninsular Fiction, Film, and Rock Culture* (Nashville, 2007); and T. L. Cowan, 'Punk Rock Clit Lit: Reading toward a Punk Poetics in Bent on Writing: Contemporary Queer Tales', *Canadian Poetry: Studies, Documents*, *Reviews*, 57 (2005): 103–21.

[73] Paul Morley, *Words and Music: A History of Pop in the Shape of a City* (London, 2003), pp. 113–15.

~~Degeneration: Joy Division and the Grounds of Pop Criticism~~Trauma and Degeneration: Joy Division and Pop Criticism's Imaginative Historicism', Paul Crosthwaite further complicates our understanding of the terms and concerns of music journalism's 'style and attitude'. Discussing commentary on Joy Division by Morley and Simon Reynolds, Crosthwaite reveals how seemingly inarticulate musicians and opaque music invite or generate wildly speculative, impressionistic writing, writing that tries to both historicise and also universalise its subject. However enthusiastic or enthusing such writing appears, it can obscure ethical concerns, as Crosthwaite attests. Keeping a focus on the post-punk era, in '~~"Natural's Not In It": Gang of Four, Scritti Politti, and Gramsci~~Is "Natural" In It?: Gang of Four, Scritti Politti, and Gramsci', David Wilkinson explains how a particular type of writing in a particular type of context – poststructuralist critical theory – resonated with, informed, and was challenged by, a particular type of popular music.[74] The next two chapters move from considering how musicians engage with 'theory', to employing theory to engage with music. Nathan Wiseman-Trowse's '~~""You Should Try Lying More": The Nomadic Impermanence of Bill Drummond~~You Should Try Lying More": The Nomadic Impermanence of Sound and Text in the Work of Bill Drummond' describes and (using the ideas of Gilles Deleuze) theorises conflicted concatenations of 'literature', art and popular music. Following his work with The KLF, Bill Drummond has created texts that are both permanent and commodified, while also generating creative activities which are designed to be impermanent, and resistant to commodification. These seemingly paradoxical practices and products realise tensions that redefine relations between 'lit' and 'pop'. Following this, Hugh Hodges' 'Fela Kuti Versus "Craze World": Notes on the Nigerian Grotesque' uses theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Giorgio Agamben to 'read' the music and words of Fela Kuti, and Nigerian novelists working

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[74] For another perspective on post-punk's relations with cultures of writing, see Karen Collins, 'Dead Channel Surfing: the Commonalities between Cyberpunk Literature and Industrial Music', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 165–78.

in the same environment. Kuti's resistance to local and global oppressions resulted in a fertile array of roles and images, articulated in language that queried distinctions between text and context, literary writing and popular music, and the living and the spirit worlds.[75]

The collection's final section offers further models and interpretations of how we might consume or use writing about, or as, or in popular music. What happens to writers' and musicians' creative practices when they interact? Given technological innovations, do writing and popular music share equally compromised or empowering modes of production and reception? Does relating popular music and literature confirm or disturb ideas of cultural hierarchy and status? Rachel Carroll's chapter, '"[S]he Loved Him Madly": Music, Mixtapes and Gendered Authorship in Alan Warner's *Morvern Callar*', explores frameworks for interpreting popular music as providing a 'soundtrack' to a complex subjectivity; more specifically, it examines the relationship between gendered models of music collecting and consumption. The eclectic tastes of Warner's young female protagonist seem to confound oppositions between masculine 'connoisseurship' and feminine fandom; however, the novel's suggestion that her soundtrack is posthumously authored by male expertise arguably reduces her musical appreciation to the imitative homage of one who merely 'loved him madly'. Shifting our perspective from music in texts, to texts 'on' music, in ~~'Writing and Recording: Grooves, Labels, Sleevenotes, Sleeves~~Audio Books: The Literary Origins of Grooves, Labels and Sleeves' Richard Osborne unearths the material and conceptual crossovers between literary and musical artefacts. These crossovers were a result of assumptions about, and expectations of, audiences' habits and sensibilities: in word, marketing. But Osborne's account illuminates the diverse ways in which markets for musical works

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[75] For further discussions of critical models for understanding the border crossings, 'signifying', spirituality, and role of figures such as the Trickster in African and African-American musics and cultures, see Ayana Smith, 'Blues, Criticism, and the Signifying Trickster', *Popular Music*, 24:2 (May 2005): 179–91.

appropriated and played with the way books were sold and consumed.[76] Developing Osborne's interest in technology, our penultimate contribution is an edited account of a wide-ranging conversation between the poet Paul Farley and Adam Hansen. Prefaced by an example of Farley's poetry, this exchange explicates how the work of a writer inspired and informed by popular music simultaneously inhabits, remembers, and re-imagines the worlds and experiences of that music, to consider the challenges of mingling media in a mixed-up, media-driven age. We end with a contribution from a pre-eminent popular musicologist; Sheila Whiteley draws on her widely recognised expertise to offer a personal response to the collection's contributions, and her take on what it might mean to correlate or contrast 'writing' and 'popular music'.

Writing matters, as much as any form of culture might, because it 'encourages questioning, and self-questioning'.[77] David Hesmondhalgh has recently tried to explain why music matters, and one of the most compelling reasons he gives is this:

Music, especially when combined with other forms of communication – and it nearly always is combined with other forms of communication – can be very powerful in forging, fostering, solidifying, and challenging values and attachments, for better or for worse.[78]

With its own questions and combinations, this collection examines what matters in music's complex relations with forms of written 'communication'. We hope, then, that *Litpop: Writing and Popular Music* furthers understandings of (and debates about) how we can make 'powerful' changes happen, or confront them.

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[76] See also Colin Symes, *Setting the Record Straight: A Material History of Classical Recording* (Middletown, CT, 2004).

[77] John Carey, *What Good Are the Arts?* (London, 2005), p. 208.

[78] Hesmondhalgh, *Why Music Matters*, p. 146.

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