American demographic segment, but in the areas of classical composition, conducting, and solo instrumentalists, the representation of this segment is scarce. In so far as the novel shows the futile struggle of overcoming American racial barriers, it amply demonstrates the historically, politically, and culturally conditioned constructedness of musical modes and preferences. But the novel clearly ventures beyond a deterministic view of music. From the very start, the ethnically mixed characters Jonah, Joseph, and Ruth defy any black-or-white modes representation. From an early point in the narrative, the reader is forced to question absolutes masked as accepted truths, and this is where advanced theories of time, which invariably argue against the common notion of chronological time, support the evolving theme of music’s inherently transcending nature: “Of course there is no time. Of course there’s nothing but standing change. Music knows that, every time out. Every time you lift your voice to sing” (629). If music validates anything within the universe of the novel, it validates the individual as a knot constituting “time,” constituting herself or himself by inclusion, not exclusion: “Not beyond color; into it. Not or; and. And new ands all the time. Continuous new frequencies” (627). One the one hand, the novel reveals classical music’s unfortunate complicity with continued racial prejudice in the USA, and the struggle of non-white musicians for recognition. At the same time, the novel keeps pressing for an understanding of exactly why music has something in it that takes it out of pre-established cultural contexts and places it into a context of existential validity.

Works Cited

KYLIE CRANE

The Beat of the Land: Place and Music in Tim Winton’s Dirt Music

Abstract: The title of Tim Winton’s 2001 novel Dirt Music reveals one of the central binaries at work within: Dirt, or place, presence, nature on the one hand, and Music, or emotions, past, culture on the other. Dirt Music, set in Western Australia, revolves around the love story between Georgie Jutland and Lu(ther) Fox. Lu, a folk guitarist, retreats from society after the tragic death of his family, who also formed his band. During his stay in the deserted North Australian coastal region, he experiments with the possibilities of living – and making music – outside of cultural constraints. The emphasis in this paper will be on how the two factors of dirt and music interplay within the construction of his identity. The novel proposes a perspective on music that eventually offers a reconciliation of the alienation of man’s identity between nature and culture.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise. (Leopold 1949, 224-5)

In his “With a Guitar. To Jane,” a poem dealing with the characters Miranda and Ariel from Shakespeare’s Tempest, Percy Bysshe Shelley devotes a lengthy passage to Miranda’s guitar, giving it its very own history and significance:

[...] The artist who this idol wrought
To echo all harmonious thought
Felled a tree, while on the steep
The woods were in their winter sleep
Rocked in that repose divine
On the wind-swept Apennine;
And dreaming, some of autumn past
And some of spring approaching fast,
And some of April buds and showers
And some of songs in July bowers
And all of love,— and so this tree—
O that such our death may be—
Died in sleep, and felt no pain,
To live in happier form again,
From which, beneath Heaven’s fairest star,
The artist wrought this loved guitar [...] (Shelley 1977, 450)
For Shelley, obviously, the worth of the guitar as a cultural artefact is much higher than its former dormant role as a part of nature, and justifies the killing of living wood. The new cultural significance gives it an everlasting, transhistorical validity that elevates it, by force of the music that it brings forth, far above the contingency of nature. A little more than 150 years later, approaches in ecocriticism no longer seem very comfortable with such a perspective. Thus, when Jonathan Bate notes that “To make a guitar, you must fell a tree; to harness the power of Ariel, you must split open a pine,” the sacrifice of nature is no longer as easily forgiven: “The price of art is the destruction of a living tree. You can’t have music without dead wood” (Bate 2000, 90 and 92). If music is thus clearly a part of culture, the question whether it alienates nature, as Bate has it, or is in sweet concord, as Shelley’s “With a Guitar” proclaims, clearly depends on the nexus of man as a ‘music-making animal,’ and his or her own relationship to place, society and nature in the process of identity formation.

This nexus is exactly what Tim Winton explores in his 2001 novel Dirt Music. As most of Winton’s novels, Dirt Music is set in the coastal regions of Western Australia. It basically relates the love story between Georgie Jutland, the unhappy live-in-girlfriend of one of the most powerful fishermen in the fishing community of White Point, Jim Buckridge, and Lu(dier) Fox, a poacher or, as the novel has it, “shamateur” (43, i.e. someone who catches and sells fish illegally), who forges an existence on the fringes of the same community. The larger story about Lu is that after a stroke of fate he retreats from society and music - to explore ways of living and, eventually, music-making, outside of all notions of ‘culture.’ The following discussion will in a first step explore the novel’s protagonists’ relation to place, presence and nature, and thus focus on the aspect that the novel’s title refers to as “dirt.” The second section will turn to the protagonists’ relation to the “music” part of the title, which includes their emotions, and their attitudes to their respective pasts and to cultural and social aspects of existence in general. The final part will then sketch how Tim Winton’s notion of “Dirt Music” employs music as a way to renegotiate and bring together place and emotions, presence and past, nature and culture.

1. Dirt: Place, Presence, Nature

Dirt Music commences with Georgie Jutland’s point-of-view, shortly before she becomes aware of Lu Fox’s existence. Her (arguably self-styled) position on the fringes of the small community of White Point strengthens Lu’s outsider status, as the reader is introduced to an outsider through an outsider. Accounts of the plot of the novel will vary according to which of the two main protagonists, Georgie Jutland or Lu Fox is foregrounded by the reader. Both share focalisation to roughly equal parts, with a few segments from Jim Buckridge’s point-of-view.1 The two characters meet after Georgie’s car breaks down on the road, and almost immediately become sexually involved with each other. Only later does it become clear to the reader that this relationship is doomed due to the conflict between the social roles of fishing baron and poacher. While Georgie takes her time deciding what to do, Lu is finally discovered poaching and decides to escape to the north to seek out a socially unencumbered existence.2 Georgie finally follows him to the north, at Jim’s insistence, who has his own personal issues to resolve with fate (both his own and Lu’s). They are finally reunited at the close of the novel. In presenting all this, the novel uses heterodiegetic narration with variable focalisation, frequently shifting into second person modes of presentation. In the following, the focus on identity and the links between place and music calls for a greater emphasis on the development of Lu’s character.

Lu’s connection to the earth is epitomised in the tragedy which causes the deaths of the remainder of his family, who also happen to be his band; the family actually earns their living playing folk music at regional venues and private functions. Their roles over on the way to a gig, and his brother, sister-in-law and their two children die. This scene is marked as formative in Lu’s character and way of life and establishes Lu’s fundamental connection with the “Dirt” of the novel’s title: Lu falls to the ground, “then there’s dirt in his mouth. The sky gone completely” (116). After this incident, Lu severs all his links to music, which leads to a strengthening of his links to the land. It follows that place is important to Lu, as it has a compensatory function for other lacks – predominantly an emotional lack, but also the related social and psychological lacks.

This becomes clear in Georgie and Lu’s first long conversation, when Georgie comments “I don’t understand what you’re doing [...] Living like this. I mean why stay on?” Lu replies: “Things, places, they’re hard to shake off” (98): By this, of course, it is meant that, for Lu, some things (emotions, social contacts) are more readily shaken off than places. Georgie, however, has troubles understanding this. She initially claims to have no ‘special’ place, but later leaves a note in an atlas revealing ‘her’ island in Coronation Gulf up north. Similarly, Lu places great importance on his ‘special’ place, a spot near his family home in the pinnacles. After Lu brings himself to show her this place, he in fact reprimands himself: “All that hard work, the exercise of discipline unravelling even as he stands there. Wind ruffles the water. Trees groan and lock horns above him” (103). By showing her his special

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After the attack on his dog, ute and trailer, the result of the White Pointers’ discovery that he has been poaching their bay, his primary concern is for the family farm: “they’ll burn the farm. That’s how it’ll go. The end, amen. You bloody idiot” (136). This sentiment once more underlines his close connection, indeed his identification, with the farm which reflects Fiske et al.’s assertions regarding Australians’ tendency to perceive “the house as a metaphor for the self, its bricks and mortar an extension of the body” (Fiske et al. 1987, 119). On his way back to the farm, after abandoning his boat on the ocean, he swims to the shore and scrambles through the forest, enduring quite an ordeal of hyperventilation, dehydration, cutting open his legs on the spinifex, and exhaustion until his strength is restored by lying down in the dunes. The image painted here sees him tied down to the supporting soil. He “retreats to the shade of the riverbank whose open veins are ropy with shadow. Feels bound to the earth by them. They pull his cheek to the soil” (153). The images of ‘earth’ and ‘soil’ highlight the regenerative properties ‘dirt’ has for Lu, his rootedness in this area, and its role for his identity. Only because his life is seriously threatened by the fishermen does Lu finally abandon his soil to escape to Georgie’s ‘secret’ place. He later sends Georgie a letter only containing some dirt from the north, which, in a striking gesture, she eats (214). This implies an embodiment of place; Lu’s connection to place becomes part of her bodily identity. The reader thus becomes aware of Georgie’s desire for Lu, also because she is looking after his farm after he has left (all this is something that Lu himself is not aware of and it serves to further the romantic level of the story through the use of dramatic irony).

Lu, meanwhile, is trying to re-establish some kind of unalienated existence:

What he wants is to slope off into the bush somewhere [...] If you want to be left alone then clear out. Go somewhere clean. Some place with water and food so you’re not skulking at the margins to keep yourself alive. No roads, towns, farms – no bloody civilians. Just walk off into the trees. [...] The idea of a place to be truly alone in – wilderness.

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His idea of wilderness seems to rest on a concept of a space which is void of cultural meaning. However, this longing is complicated by the increasing recognition that a pure state of nature is out of reach, as Jonathan Bate argues when he writes that “[w]e are confronted for the first time in history with the possibility of there being no part of the earth left untouched by man [sic]” (Bate 2004, 171). Perhaps wilderness, in the sense of nature untouched, is impossible; nevertheless, wilderness is still clearly aligned with natural areas.4

Lu’s use of maps raises the question as to what exactly is devoid of civilization – the white space on the map of Western Australia which “makes for a pretty austere chart” (160), and Lu’s glee, at the same time, when he notices the absence of White Point from the very same map – means that Lu has not yet fully recognized that a map is not indicative in this respect. This political point is underscored in the scene where Axle, an Aborigine he meets on his trip north, burns all of Lu’s maps: Lu is dismayed. But as Menzies (Axle’s companion) explains: “Got a thing about em, says Menzies. Just trouble, maps. You can’t really blame him. Like they suck everything up. Can’t blame a blackfulla not likin a map, Lu” (312), to which Axle immediately adds “Go on the country [...] Not on the map” (312), which Lu somehow does not understand. It is quite a cryptic comment: It seems that Lu is urged by Axle to see the country for what it really is (or rather, closer to what it objectively might be) and not what the map, as a symbol of the cultural charting and colonisation of nature, designates as its meaning. The burning of the maps is thus a two-way gesture: It challenges the discursive power of the map-makers by negating their delineations of space into a dichotomy of meaningful/not-meaningful space, but, simultaneously, it reduces the entire space (for Lu at least) into a white space, or perhaps even wilderness. He must find meaning himself. Furthermore, space is aligned with nature ‘until proven otherwise,’ which is, for Lu, undoubtedly a liberating experience. Nevertheless, despite all this, Menzies’ comments on Axle’s status appear to be a warning: He says of the fact that Axle has never been initiated into an Aborigine community: “No people. No country” (305). This statement appears at first to be rather simple; however, it can also be read as a reminder that space has no meaning without people inhabiting it. This is particularly important when it comes to Lu’s relationship to music and the social realms it inhabits.

2. Music: Emotions, Past, Culture

The link between place and music is reiterated throughout the novel. It is, however, also the central conflict of the novel, as Lu Fox attempts to banish music from his life following the car crash which left him without a family. Music was his main link to his family, and also his family’s main link to the ‘rest’ of the world, especially the

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White Pointers, as they were a popular band in the region. After their deaths, Lu believes he can partition off his past, and the memories and emotions that go with it, by shutting music out of his life: “Since the day you came back from the farm […] that awful static in your ears […] protected you, numbed you a little. But when it wore off you were naked” (373-4).

This link between his family, music and emotion is also present in the following passage taken from his drive up north: “Out of the low scrub a gum rises in the distance and as they pass Fox sees a white cross and a pair of elastic-sided boots. A scene from a Burl Ives song. Old Burl. How the old man loved him” (219). This scene is exemplary for much of the novel: Lu Fox notices something particular in the scenery and immediately makes an emotional link to it (here, through his deceased father) which inevitably passes through music. So, whilst he does utmost to avoid listening to music, it pervades his world nonetheless and furthermore simultaneously reveals that, in his avoidance of music, Lu Fox is actually attempting to avoid his emotions. His journey, hitch-hiking towards the north of Western Australia, is pervaded by similar encounters with music, but it is often the association of music with other character’s identities which is foregrounded – together with Lu’s agony at having to hear music – rather than the emotional links to his past. When a truckie who picks him up does not listen to music, but rather to a cricket match, the reader explicitly learns that Lu is grateful for this: “It’s hard to think of anything more dreary but at least it spares him the music” (219). Some “young blokes” in a Landcruiser listen to Judas Priest, but “its mercifully muted by windrush” (221). Rusty, the surfer on a revenge mission, listens to the rock group Steely Dan, “[full of angular licks and slick changes, lyrics that peck at you. But Lu] doesn’t want to hear it. Music unites him now; he can do without it” (225). Horrie and Bess, whom he meets just after leaving Rusty, listen to classical music: “The music is jagged and pushy and he for one just doesn’t want to bloody hear it but the outbursts of strings and piano are as austere and unconsoling as the pindan plain out there with its spindly acacia and red soil” (249). Here, the characterising quality of music is emphasised – imagine the appearance and behaviour of someone who ‘worships’ punk rock in contrast to those of a gospel-music lover, if you must, in order to understand the extent of how this shapes our preconceptions – but this always leads to an emotional response on Lu’s behalf. In this way, the association of music with society (or culture) and emotions is further underscored.

Hence, and furthermore, music is more than emotion; it also forms part of both personal and collective identity. On the fringes of society, on the edge of a plateau on the edge of the continent, Lu almost reconciles himself with music when asked by Menzies and Axle, two almost mystical figures (the first has no belly-button, and the second is haunted by premonition-like dreams), to play:

Nobody speaks. […] He settles into the chord progression and feels himself begin to relax at the feel of the frets underhand, the way the tune offers itself up for elaboration at every turn, and when he completes the cycle he can’t leave off [...] Music. And it’s not hurting anybody. (306-7)

But it is hurting, it is hurting Axle, the uninitiated, who cannot play at all. It is not a social music which Lu plays: Lu is showing off and not participating in a community event, his focus is not on himself and not on his audience. Hence, it is Lu’s personal needs which are met, and he searches to meet these without consideration for others, in this case, Axle, who is ashamed as he has never been able to learn to play. This reflects, albeit negatively, a need for community and the sharing of music, which is particularly associated with folk music styles and therefore demonstrates Lu’s inability, or unwillingness, to participate within a community.

The novel illustrates the intricacies of music and identity through the passage of Lu’s northward journey, as many of the people he travels with are characterized by the music they listen to. Whilst this immediately serves the function of demonstrating Lu’s unease with music to the extent that it physically hurts him, it also foregrounds or insists on the bond between the choice of music by individuals and identity. Clearly, music embodies cultural capital, and the choice of musical styles leads to identifications with certain sub-cultures and cultural attitudes as expressed above. The novel appears to concur with Simon Frith’s assertion that ‘folk discourse’ means that “ideally there is no separation of art and life” (39) by foregrounding such associations in most other characters, and insisting that such a separation, as undergone by Lu, is artificial and finally leads to more pain than that which he hopes to avoid by not listening to music. The rife which he has imposed on his life is only reconciled towards the end of the novel, and notably comes into being through the unification of dirt (nature) and music (as will be discussed in section three of this paper).

In order to discuss the role of music in the text, I wish to base my argument on an understanding that the discourse which feeds the use of music in the novel mostly complies with Simon Frith’s notion of folk as a music which is valued for its use and not for its internal features (cf. Frith 1998, 18). In the “folk world,” music is considered not as ‘art for art’s sake,’ but rather as a necessary part of being, valuing “the natural, the spontaneous, and the immediate” (Frichth 1998, 40), whilst also addressing the constructed character of such attributions. Lu’s status as an outsider (and the status of his whole family as outsiders) coincides with Keir Keightley’s observation that today’s folk culture emerged “in reaction to the developments of mass society [and] defined itself in its rejection of mass society and mass culture.”

6 An ecocritical perspective to the mass distribution of music is also expressed by Jonathan Bate: “You can sing a poem to a local audience,” Bate writes, but “you cannot disseminate it more widely – or hope that it will endure beyond your death or the death of your most committed listeners who have learnt your words – without paper, papyrus, electronic reproduction device or some other medium which has required the working-over of raw materials” (Bate 2000, 92). This is not Lu’s concern: He is not in need, and does not even desire, a means of perpetuating his music. What he does need is an immediate audience – and he desires Georgie as this audience – to be part of his music, which is in line, once more, with a folk music sense of community, that is, someone who can share the experience and who will give feedback: Fame plays no role. The cassette tape Georgie leaves behind does not rebuke this argument: It is not an instance of sacrificing nature for the sake of art. The traditional semiotics of a cassette tape (recorded music for its dissemination) are irrelevant in a place without a cassette player and it becomes a sign from Georgie to Lu. It is not simply a sign of civilization, but the personal recognition that speaks of the necessity that music is an integral part of Lu’s identity, and her willingness to become part of his (emotional) world.

This piece in question, a composition by Arvo Pärt, is later also associated with Bess’ death.
White Pointers, as they were a popular band in the region. After their deaths, Lu believes he can partition off his past, and the memories and emotions that go with it, by shutting music out of his life: “Since the day you came back to the farm [...] that awful static in your ears [...] protected you, numbed you a little. But when it wore off you were naked” (373-4).

This link between his family, music and emotion is also present in the following passage taken from his drive up north: “Out of the low scrub a gum rises in the distance and as they pass Fox sees a white cross and a pair of elastic-sided boots. A scene from a Burl Ives song. Old Burl. How the old man loved him!” (219). This scene is exemplary for much of the novel: Lu Fox notices something particular in the scenery and immediately makes an emotional link to it (here, through his deceased father) which inevitably passes through music. So, whilst he does his utmost to avoid listening to music, it pervades his world nonetheless and furthermore simultaneously reveals that, in his avoidance of music, Lu Fox is actually attempting to avoid his emotions. His journey, hitch-hiking towards the north of Western Australia, is pervaded by similar encounters with music, but it is often the association of music with other character’s identities which is foregrounded — together with Lu’s agony at having to hear music — rather than the emotional links to his past. When a truckie who picks him up does not listen to music, but rather to a cricket match, the reader explicitly learns that Lu is grateful for this: “It’s hard to think of anything more dreary but at least it spares him the music” (219). Some “young blokes” in a Landcruiser listen to Judas Priest, but “its mercifully muted by windrush” (221). Rusty, the surfer on a revenge mission, listens to the rock group Steely Dan, “[f]ull of angular licks and slick changes, lyrics that peck at you. But [Lu] doesn’t want to hear it. Music unites him now; he can do without it!” (225). Horrie and Bess, whom he meets just after leaving Rusty, listen to classical music: “The music is jagg- ed and pushy and he for one just doesn’t want to bloody hear it but the outbursts of strings and piano are as austere and unconsoling as the panden plain out there with its spindly acacia and red soil” (249). Here, the characterising quality of music is emphasised — imagine the appearance and behaviour of someone who ‘worships’ punk rock in contrast to those of a gospel-music lover, if you must, in order to understand the extent of how this shapes our preconceptions — but this always leads to an emotional response on Lu’s behalf. In this way, the association of music with society (or culture) and emotions is further underscored.

Hence, and furthermore, music is more than emotion; it also forms part of both personal and collective identity. On the fringes of society, on the edge of a plateau on the edge of the continent, Lu almost reconciles himself with music when asked by Menzies and Axle, two almost mystical figures (the first has no belly-button, and the second is haunted by premonition-like dreams), to play:

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claims that "folk authenticity refers to musical experiences that are valued as unalienated and uncorrupted, 'anti-mass' pleasures which were perceived to be musically pure, genuine and organically connected to the community which produced them" (Keightley 2001, 121). Indeed Keightley also places folk, blues, and country within this category, much in line with the attributions Georgie Jutland attempted to align Lu's band's music with early in the novel:

So what did you play? [Georgie asks Lu]

Guitar.

I mean, what kind of music.

Oh, I dunno. All kinds, I spose. Anythin' you could play on a verandah. You know, without electricity. Dirt music.

As in ... soil?


You can't mean country and western.

Nah. [...] Whatever felt right [...] Country blues, I spose. [...] Rootsy stuff. Old timy things.

Folk music.

I spose. No, not really. Well, I dunno. (95)

Lu's resistance to being categorised does not necessarily reflect the unsuitability of the label 'folk,' but rather a more general trait typical of many musicians: The reluctance of being categorised in the first place. One might be tempted to argue that Lu's music seems to be more like 'place music,' rather than folk music, but the sense of community in constructs of folk music is necessarily grounded: That is, it must have a location in physical space, and is hence already 'placed.' Such an understanding is also present in definitions of folk music which acknowledge that folk music may vary throughout the world, and can be regionally very specific. In this way, it is possible to refer to folk music in connection with Lu Fox, as he is adamant about the fact that his music (or the music that he used to play with his family) is closely related to place, which confirms the 'grounding' of his identity in place once more.

But there is also a momentum of disillusionment with 'folk' ideals which is crucial in the novel. In a moment of revelation, Lu realises that he had been attributing his brother, Darkie and his sister-in-law, Sal, with romantic qualities like the ones that Keightley maintains are associated with a romantic sense of authenticity in rock and roll: sincerity, directness, 'natural' sounds, sense of community and roots (Keightley 2001, 137). For example, he thinks that Darkie and Sal 'had real music in them and you could only be glad, for without them you were nothing. Those evenings you knew what was holy. Just the smell of the night and the smiles on their faces and the chords slipping each to each' (376). However, this romantic belief is shattered when he realises at last in his refuge up north that "the music wasn't in them. They barely felt it. They just liked playing [...] Darkie was an inspired mimic. He loved playing, but was only fond of music" (379). Whilst this means that Lu must "mourn his idea of them" (381), it also means that he can and wants to hear and play music again himself, as he no longer perceives his brother and sister-in-law as having exclusive claims on the 'authenticity' of music. By freeing himself of the romantic idealisation of Darkie and Sal, Lu is thus again able to delimit his own 'space' within music. Through this conscious realignment with music, Lu enables himself to play music once more, he can acknowledge the past and its emotional effect on him, and this furthermore helps him to recognize his own emotional needs (cf. 380).

3. Dirt Music: Place and Emotions, Presence and Past, Nature and Culture

Lu in fact anticipates a regeneration through the reunification of 'dirt' and 'music' in a dream about his brother and sister-in-law before he leaves White Point: "All around him, in a mist, the piping breaths of the dead; they surge and swirl and fin beneath, roundabout, alongside him. It smells of soil, their breath, of soil and creek-mud and melons" (159). Here, the ghosts of his family surround him associated with earthy images — the soil, mud and the melons which grew out of the soil. The passage continues: "He hauls himself along with his face out, his limbs butted and glanced by slick bodies, one insistent at his hip knocking again and again in bunting enquiry as he goes on like a metronome, a beat without a melody" (159, my emphasis). The immediate juxtaposition of earth and music is clear, but the two are still separated by the ghosts of the dead. The present is marked by the hollow and ungrounded beat of the metronome: It keeps the time, a heartbeat of sorts, but there is nothing more to it, it remains a monotonous presence without any melody, or life. This only changes when, in the last part of the novel, Lu settles on Georgie's 'secret' island in the north (the location of which Georgie discloses incidentally by leaving an atlas while right during the above dream). There, finally, music becomes a gateway to Lu's past; but it is not any kind of music which enables this, it is a 'natural' kind of music.

In his retreat far from civilisation on Georgie's secret island in Coronation Gulf (which turns out to be not to be so secret, after all, because, during the Dry season, tourists are flown in to fish in the 'wilderness'), Lu constructs himself a 'drone'. This drone is a peculiar musical instrument consisting of a length of fishing line drawn between two trees; it is thus inextricably linked to nature (no trees have to die, here), yet also involves a cultural element, i.e. the nylon fishing line. The drone is highly symbolic in this respect, not least since it enables Lu to overcome the dichotomy of 'dirt' and 'music.' The sound this drone produces is equated to "temperature and taste and smell and memory" (368-9), and re-opens a way to Lu's memory and emotions.

Once Lu starts playing his drone, he plays for a liberation from "the discipline that he's maintained so long, and the return to music is sheer physical pleasure, a

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7 Georgie, in contrast, utterly fails the music litmus test: "Georgie didn't know much about music. She'd stop being avid about it after adolescence and just bought stuff she'd heard on the radio" (327). However, she has the emotional access to the knowledge, as demonstrated in the revealing metaphor after listening to one of Lu Fox's tapes, which links music/emotions to place/spaces: "She felt that she'd trespassed, but also that she'd been trespassed upon" (332).

8 The tendency towards a veneration of Romanticism within folk discourse is supported by the novel's numerous references to literary Romanticism, and Lu's fascination with the likes of Wordsworth, Blake and Dickinson.

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No more singing, No more music. Or you’ll go insane. You always knew it. Since the day you came back alone to the farm with that awful static in your ears, you understood. For weeks it persisted, that stuffed sensation in your ears; it was like the hiss and fuzz left in your head after a rock gig, the half-deadness of bombardment. And it protected you, numbed you a little. But when it wore off you were naked. You had to put yourself out of reach. Of music first, and also memory because one lived in the other, but people too, because they could say anything, do anything, bring anything out at any moment and do you in without even noticing. (375-4)

After this, he no longer actively plays the drone, yet it reverberates in the wind, giving off a humming sound which causes “memories [to] flash at him, persistent and chaotic, like creatures spilling through a torn fence” (375): That is, his lapse into playing music has ripped open the barrier he erected between his existence, or subsistence, and his emotional past.

The evaluation of music is often classified as a rather subjective affair; that which one person may refer to as music may be another’s noise (cf. Brackett 2004, 124-5). This can be seen in the comparison of the way in which the sound of the drones Lu sets up in the far north of Western Australia is interpreted. Lu interprets the sound of his drone as one, one (cf. 386), whereas Georgie understands the drone to be ‘saying’ oh, oh (413). Georgie’s interpretation of the sound as oh, oh is left open: It could be read as a sigh – of disappointment or delight, for instance – or a gentle and subtle exclamation of understanding, given Georgie’s smile at the breeze continuing the sound of the drone and the ensuing passage where she becomes aware of Lu’s connection to music (416). Whilst these interpretations of the sound itself differ, it is ultimately the same sound that is being heard, and the importance of this sound is acknowledged by both characters: They recognize the sound as having (cultured) meaning, and hence interpret it as music. In doing this, they identify themselves with the music, and by extension, with each other.

The link between place and nature on the one hand, and music and emotions on the other, is forged even more strongly after Lu moves his camp. 10 The resolution of many of Lu’s conflicts is found in following passage, which evokes the effect of the new drone he builds there. Through its repetition and short beats, this ‘mascularised’ passage echoes the sound of Lu’s drone:

He bangs away until he finds a sound. An E, he thinks, but it’s only a guess. Gets himself a four-four beat with a bit of shellgrit footstep for colour and suddenly there’s a groove, a little room in there for feeling. Boom-boom-boom-boom. It’s the righteous one-chord boogie of Mister John Lee Hooker. It’s Long John Baldry. It’s Elmore James and Sleepy John Estes. It’s a jaw harp whanging down the tree into the sandstone just beginning for bottleneck and banjo. Okay not bluegrass but browngrass at least and the rest of you has to sing to it; there’s just no way you can’t. Makes you laugh, dammit. Gets your teeth buzzing. Boom-boom-boom-boom! Just one note. One, one, one, one. Yes Bill. You Bill. One command. One joy. One desire. One curse. One weight. One measure. One King. One God. One Law. One, one, one – you go up and down your note like a pop up and down a dune until you don’t feel your festering bites or your oozy eyes or sun-scoured neck, until you’re not one moment empty, nor one bit lost or one breath scared. You’re so damn far into ones you’re not one anything. You’re a resonating multiplication. You’re a crowd. (388, emphasis in original)

This passage contains the key to the novel, as the continual repetition of the word ‘one’ in the italicised and hence emphasised section imparts Lu’s becoming ‘at one’ with himself. It indicates the overcoming of dichotomies, but also highlights his isolation, as he is the only ‘one’ in the area. Yet the words “multiplication” and “crowd” hint that this ‘one-ness’ does not refer to a singular, essential state of being, but rather a plural understanding of identity which embraces several, perhaps conflicting, elements: This reading is supported by the preceding “You’re so damn far into ones you’re not one anything” (388). This one-ness hence embraces both the cultural elements of “bluegrass” or “browngrass” (a mixture of bluegrass and folk) influencing the music, or his interpretation of the music he produces, and the nature of the tree and the dirt of sandstones and dunes which influence the sound.

It is important to note the site where this passage takes place: It does not happen at Lu’s initial campsite, which the reader is led to believe is Georgie’s island from her sailing adventure – her special place –, but rather on a midden, close to a cave with Aboriginal paintings (cf. FN 10). Hence the passage can be read as a site of Lu’s personal reconciliation with and recognition of not only his personal past and tragedy, but also the larger cultural tradition of the place he calls his own, i.e. the aboriginal and settler history of Australia. The medium bringing forth these achievements is music in its precarious interaction with the givens of existence – dirt music, that is.

Works Cited

10 Lu Fox initially sets out to look for a new spot to camp or perhaps even settle in due to his uncertainty about the water source at his first site. He finds a midden (archeological term for a mound or deposit containing shells or bones which indicates a human presence) and enters into the cave nearby where he encounters rock paintings. It is to this site he moves after feeling threatened by an approaching lack of water and the increasing proximity of tourists in the area.
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The evaluation of music is often classified as a rather subjective affair, that which one person may refer to as music may be another’s noise (cf. Brackett 2004, 124-5). This can be seen in the comparison of the way in which the sound of the drones Lu sets up in the far north of Western Australia is interpreted. Lu interprets the sound of his drone as one, one (cf. 386), whereas Georgie understands the drone to be ‘saying’ oh, oh (413). Georgie’s interpretation of the sound as oh, oh is left open: It could be read as a sigh – of disappointment or delight, for instance – or a gentle and subtle exclamation of understanding, given Georgie’s smile at the breeze continuing the sound of the drone and the ensuing passage where she becomes aware of Lu’s connection to music (416). Whilst these interpretations of the sound itself differ, it is ultimately the same sound that is being heard, and the importance of this sound is acknowledged by both characters: They recognize the sound as having (cultured) meaning, and hence interpret it as music. In doing this, they identify themselves with the music, and by extension, with each other.

The link between place and nature on the one hand, and music and emotions on the other, is forged even more strongly after Lu moves his camp. The resolution of many of Lu’s conflicts is found in following passage, which evokes the effect of the new drone he builds there. Through its repetition and short beats, this ‘mysticalised’ passage echoes the sound of Lu’s drone:

He bangs away until he finds a sound. An E, he thinks, but it’s only a guess. Gets himself a four-four beat with a bit of shrill grit footstamp for colour and suddenly there’s a groove, a little room in there for feeling. Boom-boom-boom-boom. It’s the righteous one-chord boogie of Mister John Lee Hooker. It’s Long John Baldry. It’s Elmore James and Sleepy John Estes. It’s a jaw harp whanging down the tree into the sandstone just begging for bottleneck and banjo. Okay not bluegrass but browngrass at least and the rest of you has to sing to it; there’s just no way you can’t. Makes you laugh, dammit. Gets your teeth buzzing. Boom-boom-boom-boom! Just one note. One, one, one, one. Yes Bill. You Bill. One command. One order. One desire. One curse. One weight. One measure. One King. One God. One Law. One, one, one, one – you go up and down your note like a pup up and down a dune until you don’t feel your festered bites or your oozy eyes or sun-scorched neck, until you’re not one moment empty, nor one bit lost or one breath scared. You’re so damn far into ones you’re not one anything. You’re a resonating multiplication. You’re a crowd. (388, emphasis in original)

This passage contains the key to the novel, as the continual repetition of the word ‘one’ in the italicised and hence emphasised section imparts Lu’s becoming ‘at one’ with himself. It indicates the overcoming of dichotomies, but also highlights his isolation, as he is the only ‘one’ in the area. Yet the words “multiplication” and “crowd” hint that this ‘one-ness’ does not refer to a singular, essential state of being, but rather a plural understanding of identity which embraces several, perhaps conflicting, elements: This reading is supported by the preceding “You’re so damn far into ones you’re not one anything” (388). This one-ness hence embraces both the cultural elements of “bluegrass” or “browngrass” (a mixture of bluegrass and folk) influencing the music, or his interpretation of the music he produces, and the nature of the tree and the dirt of sandstones and dunes which influence the sound.

It is important to note the site where this passage takes place: It does not happen at Lu’s initial campsite, which the reader is led to believe is Georgie’s island from her sailing adventure – her special place –, but rather on a midden, close to a cave with Aboriginal paintings (cf. FN 10). Hence the passage can be read as a site of Lu’s personal reconciliation with and recognition of not only his personal past and tragedy, but also the larger cultural tradition of the place which he calls his own, i.e. the aboriginal and settler history of Australia. The medium bringing forth these achievements is music in its precarious interaction with the givens of existence – dirt music, that is.

Works Cited


CHRISTOPH REINFANDT

White Man Tells the Blues: The Power of Music and Narrative in Patrick Neate’s Twelve Bar Blues

Abstract: Patrick Neate’s 2001 novel Twelve Bar Blues is in many ways an intriguing text: Written by a white male English author, the novel utilizes the blues form in order to stage the historical impact of the ‘Black Atlantic’ (Gilroy) on late-20th-century affairs. Steeped in the jazz mythology of New Orleans, it nevertheless manages to transcend these myths by paying close attention to the pragmatic (and historical) contexts in which music and narrative exist as cultural practices. In view of the thematic scope of the present volume, the article addresses the three dimensions of its title (“White Man,” “The Blues,” and “The Power of Music and Narrative”) in order to answer the following questions: What exactly is the cultural validity ascribed to blues and early jazz in the world of the novel, and in what way is the mode of storytelling employed in the novel implicated in these assumptions?

The blues, it seems, has come to represent musical authenticity more strongly than any other musical genre. It stands for real music, for playing from the heart and letting it come naturally. Even beyond its existence as a musical genre in its own right it serves as a basic ingredient of the Romantic ideology which pits ‘authentic’ rock music against ‘commerical’ popular music on the one hand (cf. Keightley 2001) and ‘artificial’ classical music on the other (cf. Cook 2000, 6-14), an ingredient which guarantees a sense of community, tradition and continuity with the past and links current musical practices to an older folk culture of supposedly unalienated sincerity. Beyond this appropriation by mainstream Western (popular) culture, however, the blues remains one of only few cultural practices which are generally recognized as being genuinely black. As such, it is the ‘roux’ in the ‘gumbo’ of ‘true’ jazz, as Wytton Marsalis (2000, 117) points out in the influential but rather conservative stocktaking of the history of jazz which took place under his auspices in both film and book form at the end of the 20th century (cf. Burns and Ward 2000). Marsalis’s metaphorical reliance on a French term (“roux”) in combination with an Americanized French term of Bantu origin (“gumbo”) is deeply rooted in his home town New Orleans; the city of New Orleans is the pot in which the aftermath of slavery and the onset of American history created a gumbo of African and European influences.