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THE PLACES OF VAN MORRISON'S SONGWRITING

VENTURING IN THE SLIPSTREAM

Geoff Munns



The Places of Van Morrison's Songwriting

What can we learn about Van Morrison's life and work as a songwriter through his songs? This book looks closely at the lyrics and music from a selection of his songs. Some are very well-known – 'Brown Eyed Girl', 'Cleaning Windows' and 'The Healing Game'. Others are less familiar.

Through these songs, the book offers insights into some of the most important ideas that the songwriter has explored across his five-decade plus career, starting from the Them period and extending through his solo albums. These readings show how thinking about Morrison's use of place provides a specific lens that contributes to a greater understanding of his art. The songs are organized into chapters that reflect many of the important places in Morrison's work as he ventured professionally and imaginatively away from the places of his upbringing towards a wider musical world. These places are in city streetscapes and country landscapes – in home places of streets and ditches, in the enclosed spaces of rooms, in the expansive reaches of the natural world, in indeterminate and specific foreign lands. A picture emerges of the journey that Van Morrison details through his songs, one that sees him first wandering as a boy through his East Belfast haunts, and then venturing out to a wider world away from this local place.

Geoff Munns is Adjunct Associate Professor with the School of Education, University of Western Sydney. He has been a schoolteacher, school principal, a teaching academic and a university researcher. His recent doctorate explored the use of place in Van Morrison's songwriting.

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The Places of Van Morrison's Songwriting: Venturing in the Slipstream

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The Places of Van Morrison's Songwriting

Venturing in the Slipstream

Geoff Munns

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**This book is dedicated to Bonnie and Bernard.
Read, imagine, write. May your souls and spirits
continually fly into the mystic.**



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Foreword

‘I am of these streets. I belong here. These are my streets’

A couple of years ago, an article about Van Morrison’s ‘Saint Dominic’s Preview’ arrived in our offices from Western Sydney University. Even with my limited American sense of geography, I knew that this was far away from Hyndford Street, the Orangefield High School for boys, the Beechie River, Cyprus Avenue or even Saint Dominic’s Church in San Francisco. I didn’t even know that there was a Western Sydney. I knew that people lived in Australia. Don’t ask me to name where, but I was Americanly sure that they were places where ‘Brown-Eyed Girl’ was played too early. In the USA, it used to be around 8:57 p.m. (11:57 a.m. the next day in Sydney). All well before the painful voices joining in the transmogrification of ‘Sweet Caroline’ and an understanding of prohibition.

I may have a bit of an attitude. I think I ‘know’ Belfast, thanks to my mentors. Perhaps the attitude comes from Chicago to Belfast – two cities which are actually pretty hard to fully know. Yet, like so many others, I was convinced that I had fully colonized Van Morrison into my American imagination. Having received the first typescripts of this study, I thought how dare someone from Western Sydney think that they may have any line on a place where ‘the streets only know my name’. Upon receiving the submission, the first move was log into our international university database. First thought: 29,861 articles or books on Van Morrison have been published. Second check: Bezos has even worse news as Amazon sells nearly 10,000 items including t-shirts, ‘retro’ vinyl albums and God knows what else – coffee cups, tea towels, garden gnomes. (Though to be honest, I wouldn’t mind a Van Morrison garden gnome.)

When the journal received the article, later to be included in a chapter of this fine book, there were suspicions in the office. My first thought was, ‘Oh great. Here’s another Van Morrison piece stating that he is from Ireland therefore he’s important to Irish Studies.’ I always want to email a comment immediately to such submissions from our inbox asking, ‘Have you asked Van Morrison how he, to use a phrase, “self-identifies” and moreover, do you really think he cares more about Irish Studies than skiffle?’ I’d prefer 1,592

Rory Gallagher or Christy Moore articles to one more piece like that. Plus, the answers received to those actual emails enquiring about Morrison are usually pretty curt and scathing, though not at all entertaining as are the ‘rejections of rejections’ that have become popular for us among junior scholars.

Munns’ print out hit the editorial table with these snarky thoughts manifested only as a side-eye over the 2:00 p.m. cold tea. One intern thought it blasphemy that Munns consider the song and its album one of Van Morrison’s greatest, declaring, ‘Bono calls *Astral Weeks* “legal drugs”’. The all-important third tea was cold by now, but the teapot could not properly be used as a weapon considering how universities have become so liberal regarding the physical abuse of editorial interns. Mentioning Bono alone was reason not to let this assistant review the article. But his/hers was not the only strong reply. And frankly, the real kettle target would have been the bright intern who said, ‘Wait. I thought he wrote like *Moondance* or something. I heard that on this really good “oldies mix” on Spotify’. We all love and hope the best for millennials, but usually they’re their own worst enemies. Frankly, I was hoping to get out of reading something for a change. But the hyena-like behavior of this equally over-worked bunch after simply seeing the title on the file folder indicated that I needed to be a little more responsible than I had hoped to have been.

So, the chapter made its rounds to our blind reviewers. The only glitch was that most of them were cited in the footnotes, so some of the snarkiness was satisfied as I awaited the answers from ‘the footnoted’. I didn’t have to do the jerk-work, that’d be taken care of by others. Happily, that did not come to fruition. Looking more and more closely at the article in light of Van Morrison’s work, I began to realize that would not happen. From each reader/scholar cited, there seemed to come another insight; another ‘I never thought of that’, another reason to publish the article in *New Hibernia Review* in the hopes that there was a book standing somewhere behind this article. At that time, I was driving through Mount Pleasant, Iowa, and passing by the massive Budweiser distributor at 500 Golden Drive listening to the title track from one of Munns’ favourite Van Morrison albums. This was at the height of the pandemic. Most were still fearful to travel, even by road. I undertook the 10-hour drive from Saint Paul to Saint Louis working through the article in my head, listening to all the Van Morrison that I had. Stopping like Mad Max to fill the car with a gas can, that’s when I heard, thanks to Geoff Munns’ work, some sense of empathy. From the car, I heard Van Morrison as I stared dumbly up at the 25-foot Clydesdale on top of the Bud building: ‘Meanwhile back in San Francisco/I try hard to make this whole thing blend/ And we sit upon this jagged story block with you my friend’.

I heard, thanks to this Geoff Munns’ article, what the ‘whole thing’ was, rather than some hippy projection that many foist upon Van Morrison’s work. It is a jagged story block, and we look for *that* friend. Van Morrison’s work and Munns’ book does indeed make the whole thing blend.

Ultimately, the argument that this book presents is an original and important contribution to the study of Van Morrison. It is not a fanzine version of

Van Morrison but a thoughtful and learned study of his lyrics, lyricism and poetry through Munns' unique and learned lens. The sense of home, place, streets and topography reveals a great deal about Van Morrison's work that has never been addressed in this way. From Heidegger to Bachelard, Munns demonstrates through Morrison's work how artists transform their own specific, identifiable and sometimes familiarly foreign places into an artistic vocabulary that can reach out from places as far away from each other as Belfast, Saint Paul and Sydney. *The Places Of Van Morrison's Songwriting* deserves a place among Van Morrison's work and a place among the very best criticism. It takes a unique and compelling approach in searching out Van Morrison's artistic places instead of issues and times and contract disputes that will all recede. Writing here from Saint Paul Minnesota, thinking of work being done just over 9,000 miles away, I am thankful for Munns' appreciative and carefully theoretical writing on Van Morrison's work. Little has been done to this end. Munns treats Van Morrison's work in a literary and theoretical way without ever losing sight of its musical art. As a credit to the vast amount of research in *The Places Of Van Morrison's Songwriting*, this collection also serves as a guide to the best work done on Van Morrison. This book shows how Van Morrison reveals T. S. Eliot's 'the language of the tribe'. Van Morrison's language is of a very large and very complex tribe, and it is the language of Morrison's places and language that this study negotiates with great panache.

David Gardiner
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Acknowledgements

This book had its beginnings way back in the 1960s when I first heard the music of what was to become known as the British beat and rhythm and blues movement. My friends and I soaked up music by The Beatles, Rolling Stones, Animals, Yardbirds ... and Them. So began a lifelong interest in popular music. From that time on I followed Van Morrison's professional journey from the early Them days and then through all of his solo albums. In 2012, I had the time and the opportunity to turn this interest into a doctoral study at Western Sydney University. I am very thankful for this opportunity and the initial backing and support of Professor Michael Atherton. Of course, being offered a postgraduate place was just the beginning, and having the ongoing personal and professional support to carry this off was vital. So first and foremost, I cannot thank my family enough for the support and understanding that they have always given me. My wife, Maureen, gets that I have a need to keep thinking, reading and writing, and at all times allows me space to do that. Maureen and my children, Giselle and Joel, are my greatest supporters. I constantly draw on their encouragement when it is hardest to keep going. Sometimes I think I should apologize to all my family for locking myself away too much over the years, though I guess they know the road I am on. I also wonder whether one day I might apologize for enforcing the 'no other artist except Van Morrison before midday Saturday' rule on the stereo for the last 40 odd years. But ... 'don't look back', as some have famously sung. I am lucky to have long-time friends who helped me with the thesis that forms the basis of this book. Tim Crozier and I sat many times over a bottle of wine and talked about the way music supports the lyrics in the Van Morrison songs. Denis Mootz spent a lot of unpaid time proofreading the completed thesis chapters, and offered some useful editing suggestions. After the thesis was awarded, Denis and I talked about ways to turn it into a book, and he also was helpful in the drafting of the proposal. Again, his advice was invaluable. Steve and Lynne Munsie read and provided feedback on each chapter of the book, and this was really appreciated. I really value all their friendship and contributions to this ongoing work. A special mention goes to David Gardiner (editor of *New Hibernia Review*) and Gerald Dawe (Fellow Emeritus, Trinity College Dublin), both

of whom encouraged my attentiveness to and appreciation of the lyrics of Van Morrison, and supported the book proposal. I am really grateful to Heidi Bishop from Routledge who showed initial interest in the idea of the book and then maintained this interest during the review process. Her regular and helpful communications were very much appreciated over that time. My greatest thanks go to my doctoral supervisors, Matt McGuire and John Encarnacao (Western Sydney University). Matt's deep background in Irish literature really helped me see the importance of parallels and resonances across the popular music and literature domains. John's passion for music encouraged me to look beyond the lyrics to the interplay between words and performance. Together they advised and encouraged me, inevitably pushed me further from my comfort zone and occasionally drove me mad. In short, they did what excellent supervisors do. At each step of the way, their thoughtful and informed feedback helped greatly to improve each idea and piece of writing. I owe them so much.

1 Introduction – Van Morrison and Place

Walking down from Abetta Parade to the Beechie River at the Hollow in East Belfast, you will come to the little stone bridge where Van Morrison was photographed at the launch of his tourist trail.¹ This is the setting of one of Van Morrison's most well-known songs, 'Brown Eyed Girl' (1967). A few years ago, I first visited the Hollow. When I located the song within this setting, I was able to see it as a representation of a particular Belfast, a 'home place' of a backyard stream and green secret places. Viewed this way, it had become a specific, significant and localized neighbourhood, where imaginative territories were explored and defined, and later became realized in song. 'Brown Eyed Girl' is one of the early examples of the importance of this place for Van Morrison. When interviewed at the celebration of the publication launch of his selected lyrics, *Lit Up Inside*, he was asked about the importance of his local upbringing for his songwriting. He replied, 'That's the source ... mine was East Belfast, Orangefield specifically'.² The idea of a 'source' is salient when thinking about place and Van Morrison's songwriting. While the worlds that Van Morrison creates in many of his songs begin in real and experienced places, this local patch becomes important as a source for the poetics of place, where the lyrics and music explore and seek to understand social meanings imaginatively produced from the places surrounding his boyhood home. This connection between lyrics and place in Morrison's songs is the specific focus of this book – its interpretative framework and theoretical tapestry. It is widely recognized that place is a key poetic device that both defines and distinguishes his songwriting career, one that now stretches across more than 40 studio albums. For Peter Mills and Bent Sørensen, his songs frequently are about being continuously on the road, with competing feelings of longing and belonging, and these are central to his constructions of place.³ Eamonn Hughes also detects a defining conflict over place in Van Morrison's songs, observing how they 'move in two directions, drilling down and back into origins and memories, and surging outwards in ever-expanding waves to other places and to that territory that is beyond place'.⁴ The songs discussed throughout this book illustrate these different representations of place and make connections with the songwriter's personal and professional story.

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The thinking behind this book is also informed by the idea that Van Morrison's lyrics might be closely read and appreciated as song texts, and furthermore, these readings may offer important insights into the scope and range of his life and work. The significance of close readings of Van Morrison's songs has been given much impetus by the publication of two volumes of his selected lyrics.⁵ This was a clear statement by Faber – these are words that *could* and *should* be taken seriously. Critics agree. In the Foreword to *Lit Up Inside*, Ian Rankin observes that 'not every songwriter's lyrics cast such a spell when stripped of the accompanying music'.⁶ On a video recorded in 2016 when *Lit Up Inside* was featured as part of the annual celebration of Irish writing at the *Aspects Festival*, Rankin adds, 'Van Morrison's lyrics repay close scrutiny'.⁷ With this in mind, in this book I closely read a select number of songs and discuss what these might mean for our understanding of the twists and turns of the songwriter's five-decade musical journey.

Before we embark on this journey through song with Van Morrison, let us consider some of the contexts and ideas that are instructive for an understanding of the places we will be visiting along the way. We begin this by going back to the songwriter's early days in Belfast and to the specific context of Irish popular music when Van Morrison was first setting out as a musician and songwriter.

Place and the Early Days

In a radio interview with Miriam O'Callaghan in 2018, Morrison was asked about his early times as a musician. He replied, 'That was the job that I thought I was meant to be doing. I just followed what I thought was the job'.⁸ Forming a skiffle band as a 12-year old with some mates around his East Belfast home, contemplating becoming a folk singer, playing saxophone in a showband three years later, fronting a rock and rhythm and blues band as lead singer when he was 19, setting out on a solo singer–songwriter career at 22 – Van Morrison has been following his 'job' for over 50 years. This career had its beginnings in a series of critical movements in Irish popular music, and this context shows an awareness of the local, cultural and historical times, and associated places that were to become important dynamics of Van Morrison's life and work.

The 15-year-old Van Morrison left school in 1960, registered with the Musicians Union, and soon joined the Monarchs Showband as a saxophone player.⁹ He then had a world opened up for him that extended beyond his home territory. It was a world where the music he was hearing on pirate radio and through his father's extensive record collection¹⁰ found a contemporary place on the stage. Interest in this music a few years later took take him away for the first time from his hometown, when the Monarchs toured in England and then Germany, where American GIs introduced to contemporary African-American acts like Bobby Bland.¹¹ The places of his

musical world were ever-expanding, and for the young musician, it provided an opportunity to begin to experience as a performer what he previously could only participate in as a listener. It brought him closer to the music influenced by many of his musical heroes, and indeed closer to their ideas about place – the lonely life on the road of singers like Hank Williams, and the sense of attachment and reaction to locations that were the hallmarks of many blues artists.

At the same time, Morrison's interest in folk and traditional music challenged him to think more widely about lyrics and meaning, and the broadening out of the themes that might be expressed through songs.¹² Folk music was becoming increasingly popular on both sides of the Atlantic at the time Van Morrison was beginning his musical career.¹³ In particular, the influence of Bob Dylan helped Morrison see the different places where his songwriting might reside and showed him there were different places to the music world he had been inhabiting. This opened up the possibilities for him to challenge some of the existing themes of popular music.¹⁴ Interviews support this. While still in Belfast, he heard Dylan's *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan* (1963) with lyrics strongly focused on social and political issues. He enthused, '... the subject matter wasn't pop songs, ya know, and I thought this kind of opens the whole thing up'.¹⁵ This seems significant for Van Morrison's sense of place in his songwriting, and the location of important ideas that are mediated through places was to become a critical component of Van Morrison's artistic work.¹⁶

Van Morrison had also become increasingly interested in the 1930s and 1940s folk and blues musician Huddie Ledbetter (Lead Belly). Van Morrison recalls that he was inspired to play guitar by listening to records by Lead Belly: 'My major influence was Lead Belly. If it wasn't for him, I may never have been here'.¹⁷ It is not a stretch to conclude that the issues Lead Belly was singing about would influence Morrison. In the late 1930s, folk music was perceived by many to be 'an outlet for social protest',¹⁸ and Lead Belly songs such as 'Bourgeois Blues' (1937) and 'The Scottsboro Boys' (1938) were meeting a demand for original songs with social relevance. These songs utilized specific places to explore issues of social relevance – and this would later become Van Morrison's stock-in-trade. At a more local level, Van Morrison talks about how he was inspired by The McPeake Family, and their song, 'Purple Heather'.¹⁹ The lyrics contain many of the motifs (changing seasons, falling leaves, mountainsides, shared journeys) that Van Morrison would later employ in songs about place and the natural world. When we think about these influences, a picture emerges of Van Morrison exploring new ideas in the lyrics of songs and locating these in places across the built and natural worlds. There are also wider parallels in folk and traditional music with Van Morrison's relationship to place – the strong sense of roots, locality and 'belonging' to particular places that is central to folk music. This certainly coincides with Van Morrison's feeling of rootedness in songs that return to local places through memories and seek to 'preserve' these as a critical aspect

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of his identity.²⁰ Folk music is also interested in the lives of ordinary people, and we find this throughout Van Morrison's songs. Finally, the natural world is very much the privileged location of folk music, and this features throughout Van Morrison's career, starting as early as the 1970s in the *Moondance* album (1970), and gaining momentum through the 1970s and 1980s.

Skiffle music provided another connection with the music of Lead Belly. It was driven by the raw energy of early rock and roll, and the influences of Black American and 50s British jazz.²¹ Lonnie Donegan came to the early attention of Van Morrison through his connection with the music of Lead Belly. In a 2005 interview, Van Morrison declared, 'For me, skiffle tapped into the Lead Belly thing ... when Lonnie Donegan started coming out with versions of Lead Belly songs, that's when it all kicked in for me'.²² It kicked in early. Van Morrison formed a makeshift skiffle group, The Sputniks, with neighbours and friends from around his home as a 12-year old in 1957. Early ideas around place and identity might be traced to this time. 'The Street Only Knew Your Name' (1974) looks back to the early days of playing music and the importance of local acceptance and street 'cred', and fits within the period of the skiffle movement with its strong street associations.²³

There was a more auspicious introduction into the world of rock and roll and rhythm and blues when he fronted the Belfast band, Them.²⁴ The British beat and rhythm and blues movement²⁵ had followed the American rock and roll scene, and, to a lesser extent, the skiffle scene. Early Irish beat bands like the Greenbeats and Bluesville looked to distance themselves from the commerciality of showbands and instead strove for what was perceived as a more 'authentic' sound. Authentic here meant drawing on Black American music and the 'energy and speed' of rock and roll's backbeat.²⁶ This is close to what Allan Moore refers to as the 'commonest attribution of the [authentic] term ... the maintenance of the origins of a performance practice'.²⁷ This notion of authenticity parallels its conceptualization of connections between performer and listener through links to particular places and times. It is fair to say that Them were to straddle both these conceptualizations of authenticity. They covered Black American music, for example, John Lee Hooker's 'Don't Look Back' (1964), Jimmy Reed's 'Bright Lights, Big City' (1961), Ray Charles' 'I Got A Woman' (1957), James Brown's 'Out Of Sight' (1964),²⁸ but also recorded eleven Van Morrison compositions for *The Angry Young Them* (1965) and *Them Again* (1966). Many of these original songs use place as a key lens through which their ideas are explored.

The history of Them and their first gigs at Belfast's Maritime Hotel in College Square North in 1964 is well documented.²⁹ Suffice to say that Them's involvement in the British beat and rhythm and blues movement (with, among others, Rolling Stones, Animals, Yardbirds, Pretty Things, all bands playing American blues and rhythm and blues), and their penchant for unruly and unreliable behaviour together with uncompromising blues performances, quickly earned them a reputation that took them to London. Here Van Morrison met notable performers – Little Walter, John

Lee Hooker and Gene Vincent.³⁰ Importantly, their ‘blackness’ in the form of their playing of American rhythm and blues was seen as challenging and escaping from sectarianism, offering alternatives to Belfast and Irish youth from fixed notions of Protestant and Catholic identities. This was an alternative conceptualization of identity that was predicated on place in a different way. For certain groups of young people, the symbolism of the Maritime Hotel resided in its importance as the place where popular music crossed local and international boundaries and times. Here, a home-grown band connected with and pioneered music that was now spanning generations of Black music, and becoming a critical mid-1960s movement. Here, identity as a follower of music was not circumscribed by social, cultural or historical orders. Here the ‘Spanish rooms on the Falls’³¹ was not a place just for those with certain backgrounds, but where all could hang out regardless of background and hitherto perceived differences.

Other Van Morrison songs recorded by Them highlight his developing sense of place. The seminal Van Morrison song, ‘Gloria’ (the B side to Them’s second single),³² was, beyond its rock appeal, pointing to an important relationship between the localness of the lyrics and its wider international appreciation. Gerald Dawe makes explicit connections between the song and the songwriter’s home town, and talks about how the brashness of the calling out in the street was very much part of a common Belfast street scene.³³ ‘Local’ here is not so much bound to a specific place but to a deployment of an aesthetic and is very similar to the ways Van Morrison sings with an East Belfast accent [for example, ‘If You And I Can Be As Two’ (1965) and ‘Coney Island’ (1989)]. As one of the very early recorded songs by Van Morrison, ‘Gloria’ foreshadows Van Morrison’s use of place in his future writing. Other songs on the two Them albums reinforce this prescience – from the graveyard image of ‘Mystic Eyes’ (1965) to the Dylanesque protest song, ‘You Just Can’t Win’ (1965),³⁴ with its geographical references to London rather than Belfast, to the Belfast-inspired foggy city bay and mountain slopes of ‘Hey Girl’ (1966).

What can be summarized from Van Morrison’s early musical career as he moved from skiffle to showband and then to fronting a rhythm and blues band? He was very much involved in discourses around identity and authenticity. Identity was positioned between the places of his formative years, and the imperatives that compelled him to leave those places. Discourses of authenticity would ply the common ground between connection to specific places and times in Van Morrison’s songwriting and the ‘blues ideal’ of appropriating musical forms, and then performing them in local contexts.³⁵ Finally, this visioning and positioning point to one of the defining characteristics of the Irish popular music movement from the 1960s onwards, as it responded to evolving points of contact between the local and the global, and worked against negotiations surrounding older values and notions of identity. ‘Hybridity’ in Irish music grew out of perspectives on each side of the liminal spaces surrounding an essential ‘Irishness and the global culture

of rock music'.³⁶ Hybridity sits at the heart of negotiations within the dominant themes of identity and authenticity and the impact of mobility and exile that have played out across much of the Irish popular music scene. Such negotiations lay ahead of the young Morrison as he ventured professionally and imaginatively away from the places of his upbringing towards a wider musical world. They would be later caught in experiences across temporal and physical locations, physical and spiritual mobility that would have him travelling to faraway places on a restless 'path to enlightenment',³⁷ while at the same time harbouring a yearning to recapture earlier times. These negotiations would be found in city streetscapes and country landscapes – in home places of streets and ditches, in the enclosed spaces of rooms, in the expansive reaches of the natural world, in indeterminate and specific foreign lands. These are the places of Van Morrison's songwriting we will be visiting throughout this book.

Notes

- 1 This trail is in partnership with the Connswater Community Greenway. Called, 'The Mystic of the East – Van Morrison Trail'; it was launched in August 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.vanmorrison.com/about/van-morrison-trail>.
- 2 The Lyric Theatre, London, 17 November, 2014. Retrieved from <https://www.vanmorrison.com/videos/van-morrison-lit-up-inside-q-a-london>. Quote is at 3.14.
- 3 Peter Mills, *Hymns to the Silence: Inside the Words and Music of Van Morrison* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 251.
Bent Sørensen, 'The Celtic Ray: Representations of Diaspora Identities in Van Morrison's Lyrics'. In eds. Michael Böss, Irene Gilsenan Nordin and Britta Olinda, *Re-Mapping Exile: Realities and Metaphors in Irish Literature and History* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005), 159.
- 4 Eamonn Hughes, 'Introduction'. In ed. Van Morrison, *Lit Up Inside* (London: Faber, 2014), xviii.
- 5 Van Morrison, *Lit Up Inside* (London: Faber, 2014); Van Morrison, *Keep 'Er Lit* (London: Faber, 2020).
- 6 Ian Rankin, 'Foreword'. In ed. Van Morrison, *Lit Up Inside* (London: Faber, 2014), xii.
- 7 The Lyric Theatre, London, 17 November, 2014 – video retrieved from <https://www.vanmorrison.com/videos/an-evening-with-van-morrison-lit-up-inside-september-2016>. Quote is at 6.39.
- 8 Reported on the same day by Aoife Finneran for the *Irish Sun*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesun.ie/tvandshowbiz/music/3548371/van-morrison-music-genius-price-success-new-interview/>.
- 9 Johnny Rogan, *Van Morrison. No Surrender* (London: Vintage, 2006); David Burke, *A Sense of Wonder: Van Morrison's Ireland* (London: Jawbone, 2013). When the Monarchs disbanded, Van Morrison joined other showbands – the Manhattan Show Band and then the Golden Eagles. See Rogan, 71–79.
- 10 His father's record collection was extensive and included country singers (Hank Williams, Jimmie Rodgers, gospel artists (Mahalia Jackson), and jazz and blues performers (Jelly Roll Morton, Big Bill Broonzy, Muddy Waters and Louis Jordan). See Rogan, 20.
- 11 Rogan, 62.

- 12 Van Morrison recalls in interview that he had planned to be a folk singer while he was still at school, even auditioning (unsuccessfully) with the BBC (Rogan, 33).
- 13 In the United States, the activism of Pete Seeger, Joan Baez and Bob Dylan drew attention to environmental and social issues. See David Ingram, “‘My Dirty Stream’”: Pete Seeger, American Folk Music, and Environmental Protest’, *Popular Music and Society*, 31, 1, (2008), 21–36; Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk and the Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012). In the United Kingdom, folk music developed an increasing focus on the natural world that spread across folk-rock and psychedelia in a ‘getting back to the garden’ movement. See Rob Young, *Electric Eden* (London: Faber & Faber, 2010), 7.
- 14 Erik Hage, *The Words and Music of Van Morrison* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2009), 30.
- 15 Clinton Heylin, *Can You Feel the Silence? Van Morrison: A New Biography* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2002), 134.
- 16 Note also that this influence extended into his early albums (*Moondance, His Band And The Street Choir*) when he relocated to Woodstock from New York City in 1969 and was a neighbour of Bob Dylan and several members of The Band (Rogan, 2006, p. 234).
- 17 Burke, 42–43. Van Morrison also listened to Scottish folk singer Rory McEwen who performed Lead Belly songs.
- 18 Francis Davis, *The History of the Blues* (New York: Hyperion, 1995), 177.
- 19 Mills, 192. Note that this is a traditional song alternatively named ‘Wild Mountain Thyme’. Van Morrison recorded ‘Purple Heather’ for his 1973 album, *Hard Nose The Highway*. It was one of the first cover songs he recorded in his solo career.
- 20 Martin McLoone, ‘Rootedness and Transcendence: Van Morrison’s Belfast’. In ed. Martin McLoone, *Film, Media and Popular Culture in Ireland*, (Dublin: Irish Academia Press, 2008), 166.
- 21 Mills, 32.
- 22 Burke, 43. Van Morrison recorded a live album with Lonnie Donegan, jazzman Chris Barber and Dr John (among others) in 1998 – *The Skiffle Sessions – Live In Belfast 1998*.
- 23 Gillian Mitchell, ‘From “Rock” to “Beat”’: Towards a Reappraisal of British Popular Music, 1958–1962’, *Popular Music and Society*, 36, 2, (2013), 194–215.
- 24 They began their musical career as The Gamblers in 1962 and Van Morrison joined them as a 19-year old playing saxophone and harmonica and doing some of the vocals. See Burke, 2013, 66.
- 25 Also referred to as the ‘British Invasion’ – the term used to describe the period in the 1960s when rock acts became popular in the United States.
- 26 Gerry Smyth, *Noisy Island: A Short History of Irish Popular Music* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005), 26–32.
- 27 Allan Moore, *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Recorded Popular Song* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Group, 2012), 263.
- 28 It is also of interest that they recorded Bob Dylan’s ‘It’s All Over Now, Baby Blue’ (1965), given his influence on Van Morrison.
- 29 The history tells the story of legendary improvised performances by Van Morrison, heated disagreements about musical style and damaging managerial and contractual issues (see, among others; see Heylin, 2002 and Rogan, 2006).
- 30 Rogan, 2006, 109. They also shared the stage with now famous artists, The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, The Animals, The Moody Blues and Georgie Fame.
- 31 See ‘The Story of Them’.