



ROUTLEDGE
HANDBOOKS



The Routledge Handbook of Progressive Rock, Metal, and the Literary Imagination

Edited by Chris Anderton and Lori Burns

This expansive and ambitious volume avoids the allusions and gaps often found in prior scholarship that spans the humanities and social sciences. Rather than vaguely allude to overlaps between progressive rock and metal, this volume's contributors systematically investigate the notable overlaps that emerge as musicians (and fans) of both genres draw upon literature in deliberate and varied fashion. Thus, the contributors delve into the literary source materials used by prog and metal musicians; they interrogate the manner in which those sources are adapted; and they take seriously the reception and resonance of the elements that result from this interplay between music and literature. The contributors also fill a notable gap. They not only focus on the usual bands (e.g., Yes, Tool), nations (e.g., the U.K. and U.S.), and literary sources (e.g., Tolkien, science fiction) found in progressive rock and metal, they also present in expert fashion the geographical sprawl (e.g., from bands and audiences in South America to those in Asia) and literary diversity (e.g., from Aristotle to anime) that mark both musical genres. This expansive volume offers much-needed correctives *and* illuminating advances, and hence, it will serve as an important resource for scholars in multiple disciplines.

Timothy J. Dowd

Emory University, U.S.A.

This [is] an outstanding collection of chapters that explore the intersections between progressive rock, metal and the literary imagination. Each contribution here is a must-read and the editors have done an incredible job framing the Handbook.

Karl Spracklen, PhD, AcSS

Leeds Beckett University, U.K.

Chris Anderton and Lori Burns have compiled an immense collection of chapters that are wide-ranging and far-reaching in their historical, geographical and disciplinary diversity. Exploring the myriad ways in which aspects of songs, albums, album art and live performances intersect with storytelling and storyworlds, *Progressive Rock, Metal and the Literary Imagination* offers scholars, listeners and fans a fresh perspective on these two titanic genres.

Nick Braae

Waikato Institute of Technology, New Zealand

There are many book-length studies of progressive rock and metal, but none have tackled directly how prog and metal musicians engage with storytelling and literary themes—an indispensable defining characteristic of both genres. For *The Routledge Handbook of Progressive Rock, Metal, and the Literary Imagination*, Chris Anderton and Lori Burns have assembled an impressive array of contributions from among the leading scholars in the field, providing a wealth of analytical frameworks and perspectives that shed new light on this rich and fascinating repertoire.

Mark Spicer

City University of New York, U.S.A.



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THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF PROGRESSIVE ROCK, METAL, AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

This Handbook illustrates the many ways that progressive rock and metal music forge striking engagements with literary texts and themes.

The authors and their objects of analytic inquiry offer global and diverse perspectives on these genres and their literary connections: from ancient times to the modern world, from children's literature to epic poetry, from mythology to science fiction, and from esoteric fantasy to harsh political criticism. The musical treatments of these literary materials span the continents from South and North America through Europe and Asia. The collection presents critical perspectives on the enduring and complex relationships between words and music as these are expressed in progressive rock and metal.

The book is aimed primarily at an academic market, valuable for second- through final-year students on undergraduate courses devoted to both popular music and to literary studies, and to postgraduate programs and researchers in a range of fields, including popular music studies, musicology, creative music performance and composition, songwriting, literary studies, narrative studies, folklore studies, science fiction studies, cultural studies, liberal studies, and sociology, and for media and history courses that have an interest in the intersection of narratives, music, and society.

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Edited by Chris Anderton and Lori Burns

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INTRODUCTION

Reflections on the Literary Imagination in Progressive Rock and Metal

Chris Anderton and Lori Burns

The genres of progressive rock and metal have long been recognized for their storytelling modes of expression and their strong ties to literary forms. From the earliest examples of progressive rock in the 1960s to the current proliferation of progressive rock and metal in the new millennium, the musical works of progressive rock and metal artists reveal a fascination for stories and a capacity for bringing these stories to life through musical gestures, forms, textures, and timbres. For instance, many bands have created concept albums based around literary source materials or made use of literary techniques to build storyworlds and tell stories that offer more than mere fantasy and escapism, with narratives and themes that comment on the social, cultural, and political milieus in which they were made. With popular music discourse serving as a persuasive tool for the negotiation of socio-cultural power, and as musical artists increasingly mobilize new digital technologies and social media platforms to build elaborate storyworlds, it is vital to develop cultural literacy (Kellner 2011) for this growing body of work.

Within the larger context of popular music, the appellation “progressive” connotes the exploration of style expansion, genre fusions, innovative forms and timbre resources, and reflective narratives, with leading artists drawing upon creative elements from a broad base of musical and cultural influences. By choosing to explore—under one title—the genres of progressive rock and metal, our intention is to shed light on their shared lineage as it emerges through a common interest in and fascination with literary content. In so doing, the collection aims to explore both the past and present contexts of this significant popular music lineage and to illuminate a significant part of the discourse that is shared by rock and metal.

This introductory chapter first offers a brief overview of the intersections between the broad-based genre formations known as progressive rock and metal in order to support the inclusion of these forms alongside each other within one text. Each has roots in the late 1960s social and musical milieu of the U.K., where they developed in parallel through the early part of the 1970s before becoming established as genre categories in the mid 1970s (Weinstein 2013; Anderton and Atton 2020). In terms of their lyrical concerns, there are considerable parallels in terms of how they draw on literary and mythological sources. Michael Ingham (2022) argues that this is more broadly common to the English popular song tradition, where songwriters “borrow” from literary sources and layer them alongside their own ideas and a musical accompaniment that gives rise to polyvalence of meaning. Following this genre overview, we then discuss our understanding and use of the term “literary imagination,” drawing on the work of Derek Attridge (2015) to question

definitions that apply checklists of criteria or create cultural divisions between high and popular forms of literature. Next, we examine the role of concept albums (and broader transmedia storytelling), recognizing that there is a strong identification between such presentational forms and the albums released by progressive rock and metal artists. The final section outlines the different sections and chapters that comprise the book, chapters that address the fundamental question that underpins this book: “How are narratives and fictions translated into the works of progressive rock and metal artists and bands?” Each of the chapters explores how selected artists and bands approach and make use of literary sources and models in their music, including the analysis and interpretation of emblematic works. Our authors and their objects of analytic inquiry offer global and diverse perspectives on these genres and their literary connections: from ancient times to the modern world, from children’s literature to epic poetry, from ancient mythology to science fiction, and from esoteric fantasy to harsh political criticism. The musical treatments of these literary materials span the continents from South and North America through Europe and Asia. The collection offers critical perspectives on the enduring and complex relationships between words, music, and diverse cultures, as these are expressed in progressive rock and metal.

The Intersection of Progressive Rock and Metal

With its origins in the psychedelic counterculture and freeform rock radio (a format featuring long-playing records) in the late 1960s, progressive rock of the 1970s was characterized by formal complexity, dynamic variety, instrumental experimentation, and the influence of classical, folk, jazz, and electronic music (Covach 1997; Holm-Hudson 2002; Macan 1997; Martin 1998; Moore and Martin 2018). Progressive rock flourished in the 1970s, led initially by British bands such as King Crimson, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Pink Floyd, Genesis, Jethro Tull, Yes, Soft Machine, and Camel, but quickly expanded internationally and in a variety of forms. Examples include bands such as Rush (Canada), Los Jaivas (Chile), PFM (Italy), Magma (France), and Gong (multi-national), alongside a range of subgenres such as Krautrock (Can, Faust, Amon Düül II), prog-folk (Jethro Tull, Comus, Strawbs), jazz-rock/fusion (Nucleus, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Return to Forever), space rock (Hawkwind, Nektar, Eloy), and rock-in-opposition (Henry Cow, Art Zoyd, Univers Zero). This has led Chris Anderton (2010) to refer to progressive rock as an example of a “meta-genre” since the various subgenres noted above encompass such a broad array of musical styles and approaches, both within each subgenre and between them. The generic boundaries are porous, and as Allan Moore (2005, 2012) suggests, this leads to a focus on band-related musical idiolects.¹

The influence of the 1970s groups typically classified as progressive rock expanded into the metal scene during the 1980s and 1990s, alongside growth in so-called neo-progressive groups (such as Marillion, Pallas, and Pendragon) who developed updated versions of the musical models of the 1970s (Anderton 2016; Forthcoming). Pioneering metal bands such as Black Sabbath and Judas Priest began to incorporate progressive rock influences in the mid 1970s, while the late 1970s and early 1980s saw crossovers between hard rock, metal, and progressive rock in the then developing “new wave” of British heavy metal (NWOBHM), including the use of extended song forms and keyboards.² During the 1980s, bands such as Watchtower, Queensrÿche, Fates Warning, and Dream Theater developed a new style of metal, prominently influenced by Rush as well as by NWOBHM bands such as Iron Maiden, which embraced the values of progressive rock (e.g., harmonic, rhythmic, and formal complexity, instrumental virtuosity, and concept-driven albums) much further, yet within a heavier sonic world more strongly associated with metal. The influence of progressive rock has since been felt in a variety of branching metal subgenres since the 1980s,

such as thrash metal (Voivod, Anacrusis, Coroner), death metal (Death, Cynic, Opeth), black metal (Enslaved, Borknagar, In the Woods...), folk metal (Moonsorrow, Arkona), power metal (Blind Guardian, X Japan, Kamelot), neoclassical metal (Yngwie Malmsteen, Symphony X), gothic and symphonic metal (The Gathering, Nightwish, After Forever), alternative metal (Tool, Deftones), and djent—a subgenre pioneered by the Swedish band Meshuggah, whose influence continues to be felt to this day across contemporary progressive metal (Periphery, Tesseract, Animals as Leaders). Other notable artists, such as Devin Townsend and Kayo Dot, have taken a polystylistic approach, blending progressive rock and metal with genres such as jazz, pop, and new age. Thus, the originating values of progressive rock have traveled into new and innovative musical territories such as dense chromaticism, polyrhythmic structures, a heightened level of virtuosity, and extreme styling (Hegarty & Halliwell 2011; McCandless 2013; Pieslak 2008). Traditional progressive rock did not die out; artists such as Spock's Beard, Transatlantic, Porcupine Tree, Steven Wilson, Anathema, The Tangent, and The Pineapple Thief have maintained a focus on traditional progressive rock stylings while also incorporating influences of metal, electronic music, and pop to further expand the scope of what may be categorized as progressive rock. Since 2000, both progressive rock and progressive metal have thrived, with bands continuing to explore genre intersections, literary models, and the concept album, resulting in a diversity of styles and approaches.

While there are numerous book-length scholarly publications regarding the histories of progressive rock and metal (Martin 1996, 1998; Macan 1997, 2006; Weinstein 2000; Kahn-Harris 2007; Holm-Hudson 2008; Hegarty and Halliwell 2011; Walser 2014; Cope 2016), as well as a growing number of book chapters and journal articles, relatively few studies have examined the ways in which these genres intersect with the literary imagination. In relation to progressive rock, Edward Macan (1997) argues that the lyrics “draw on mythology, fantasy literature, science fiction, or sacred texts of the past as metaphors for an ideal society towards which we might strive” (80), thus placing progressive rock as an outgrowth from the ideologies and beliefs of the psychedelic rock counterculture of the late 1960s. For Macan, there are two primary themes: striving toward an idealized utopian society, and warnings of a dystopian technocratic future. Paul Hegarty and Martin Halliwell explore these ideas further by drawing attention to a “central tension [...] between nature and machines, harkening back to modernist culture of the early twentieth century” (2011, 85). For these authors, this trajectory creates combinations of “modernist topoi (alienation, exile, fantasy, escape) [with] recycled traditional forms (myth, folktale, ballad, suite)” (86), but “without direct political engagement” (87). This latter point was earlier explored by Jay Keister and Jeremy Smith (2008) who found that bands such as Yes, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, King Crimson, and Genesis had at times incorporated criticisms of militarism and of social conformity into their lyrics—what the title of their article refers to as the “nasty side of progressive rock.” Their argument focuses on how their music was received and interpreted by American audiences, and reinforces that while there may not be direct engagement with political activities, the lyrics of some progressive rock songs may act to confirm, reinforce, or challenge the belief systems of listeners. In other words, they can offer more than simple escapism, though it requires an active audience to engage in interpretation. For instance, Chris McDonald (2009) argues that the escapist fantasies found in the lyrics of Rush may be interpreted as the band addressing “the spiritual emptiness of the suburbs through symbolic quests to find something ‘more’ to life and something more to the self” (58).

Deena Weinstein argues that many fans and critics of heavy metal regard the lyrics of metal songs as “less relevant as words than as sound” (2000, 26), yet we would argue that while there is merit to this observation, metal lyrics are also worthy of study and that, like progressive rock, there is a tendency to draw on literary and mythological source material as inspiration. Fletcher and

Umurhan's edited collection, *Classical Antiquity in Heavy Metal Music* (2020a) clearly shows the many connections present between metal music and the myths, histories, and writings of classical civilizations. In that volume's Introduction, they refer to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, to Hesiod's *Works and Days* and *Theogony*, and to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (2020b), while the chapters in the collection as a whole show the influence of ancient Roman, Greek, Egyptian, and Byzantine civilizations (2020a). More broadly, metal music has drawn on national myths, folk epics, and poetry such as the Finnish Kalevala and the Prose Eddas and Poetic Eddas of Old Norse mythology, as well as on more contemporary mythmakers such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*—a common area of crossover between metal and progressive rock.

A further crossover is the use of literary sources, including books such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (Mastodon's *Leviathan*, and Ahab's *The Call of the Wretched Sea*), and Cormac McCarthy's *Blood Meridian* (Watain's *The Wild Hunt*)—forming what Samuel Thomas (2022) has tentatively referred to as “literary metal” (409). Further examples include Metallica's “For Whom The Bell Tolls” (from *Ride the Lightning*), which is based on the Ernest Hemingway novel of the same name, numerous songs by Iron Maiden, and Celtic Frost's *Into the Pandemonium*—an album that not only draws on Babylonian and Egyptian mythology in several songs but also on the poetry of Emily Brontë (on “Inner Sanctum”) and Charles Baudelaire (on “Sorrows of the Moon”). Baudelaire's poetry was also used by the Russian band Chernyi Obelisk, discussed by Caroline Ardrey in her contribution to the edited collection *Multilingual Metal Music* (Valijärvi, Doesburg, and Digioia 2021).

The Literary Imagination

In referring to the “literary imagination” in the title of our book, we are drawing attention to three different perspectives that may be in play in relation to the songs, albums, and associated texts that lie at the heart of the chapters that follow. First, there are the perspectives to be found in the original source material that musicians and songwriters may have drawn upon in their creative activities. Second, there is the imaginative act of those songwriters and musicians in adapting stories and ideas from source material—an act of translation that can lead to new metaphors and allusions related to their own experiences of the social, cultural, and political worlds in which they live. Finally, there is the imaginative act of the listener who engages with the music produced. As Derek Attridge notes of the reading experience, the “literary work comes into being only in the event of reading,” and we would argue that this is also true of musical works. From these perspectives come three key approaches for researchers to engage with the role that the literary imagination plays in music: to seek and explore the underlying literary sources; to examine how those sources have been used and adapted to comment on contemporary issues; and to examine the aesthetic effects of the new work to be received by the listener. In the Introduction to the *Routledge Companion to Music and Modern Literature*, Rachael Durkin et al. note that “our experience is highly individual. Our own understanding and appreciation will reflect that, and may not align with the artist's own” (2022, 2).³

The term “literary” requires further consideration, as it has been used in a broad sense by our contributors to include, for example, poetry, mythology, religious texts, history, fiction, science fiction, children's stories, and even the original creative writings of the band itself. One way to determine whether something is “literature” is to apply a range of criteria, such as the “use of poetic language or imagery” (Smith 2022), or the use of uncommon metaphors, symbols, and intertextual allusions to other authors/texts (Keeble 2022). To this we might add the elegant use of rhyme, alliteration, meter or syntax, carefully crafted phrases and sentences, and the expectation

that the text will be read aesthetically rather than as a popular entertainment. Implicit in the use of such criteria is an evaluative and hierarchical aspect that pits the literary and the popular against each other, suggesting that the popular or generic is inferior. Moreover, the evaluative criteria for judging whether something is carefully crafted, elegant, and so on is left somewhat opaque and places power in the hands of professional critics and others who have the power to decide whether something is literary or not.

We prefer to follow Derek Attridge's (2015) lead in adopting a "classificatory sense of literature" (15) that encompasses all imaginative writing and written texts—to consider all texts as potentially literary, but only becoming so through the act or event of reading (25) (or listening in our case). The "literary" element, for Attridge, is provided by "a particular kind of pleasure" described as "an opening to otherness" (16). Works that are regarded as literary can be re-read, gaining richness and power through their re-reading, and there will be texts that would "not be conventionally labelled 'literature' that nevertheless lend themselves to a literary reading" (17). This conception collapses the division between high and popular literature and is characterized by Attridge in three ways. First, there is a sense of "otherness," typified by an element of surprise or unfamiliarity on a small or large scale: that you learn something new (55). Second, there is a sense of "inventiveness" where pleasure is gained from recognizing the creativity of the author and also from the reader/listener engaging their own creativity in their interpretation and reception of the text. Finally, there is a "sense of singularity" through which the text is perceived to be "different from any other work we know, even though its materials [...] may be familiar." Any work that can be described in such ways has the potential to be regarded as a literary text or, in our words, to promote the "literary imagination": whether this is by musicians during the compositional process, or by listeners later engaging with their works. This line of thinking accords with that of Matt BaileyShea (2021), who refers to well-worn arguments about the inability of musical lyrics to meet the literary standards and expectations of poetry. He argues, in contrast, that "the idea that the words of a song could easily be exchanged for any other words without damage—would ring false (and appallingly so) for most music lovers" (4). Lyrics operate in a different way, and while often failing to meet literary criteria, may still be experienced as literary phenomena. Similarly, works that might not otherwise be deemed "literary," such as nursery rhymes and nonsense verse, can still be an important part of a musician's literary imagination. A good example is found in the wordplay of the lyricist Robert Wyatt, whether solo or in his work with Soft Machine and Matching Mole, who drew inspiration from authors such as Lewis Carroll and Edward Lear (see Elliott 2014).

The Concept Album and Transmedia Storytelling

A common component of the intersection of the literary imagination and popular music is the *concept album*. Interest in concept-based albums extends across multiple music genres, revealing its potential for artistic expression that is grounded in specific musical contexts, cultures, and aesthetics. The concept album, in which a story or idea is told or explored through music, lyrics, and artwork, was initially prompted by the introduction of the album format. As Hegarty and Halliwell (2011) suggest, musicians in the late 1960s and 1970s saw the potential for using the format to mix genres, develop a new aesthetic for album artwork, and be more ambitious both musically and in terms of lyrical narrative than was possible on a 45-rpm single (65). Landmark albums such as The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967) and Frank Zappa's *Freak Out!* (1966) are regarded as important precursors and as inspirations for other musicians of the time, though they were by no means the only musicians pushing the boundaries of what could be achieved on a long-playing 33-rpm album.

In the 1970s, progressive rock became strongly associated with the concept album format, whether telling narrative stories across an entire album (Letts 2010), restricting narratives to single (and often side-long) tracks, or writing a group of songs that shared a broad theme rather than a continuous story. Good examples of these three approaches can be found, in turn, on Rick Wakeman's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1974), Emerson, Lake & Palmer's *Tarkus* (1971), and Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973). As these examples suggest, the narratives performed on these albums may relate to prior literary sources, or be written by the musicians themselves. In the 1980s, metal bands also began to adopt the concept album, with Iron Maiden an important exemplar in the U.K., beginning with *Seventh Son of a Seventh Son* (1988), while in the U.S., Queensrÿche released *Operation: Mindcrime* in the same year. Since the millennium, music critics have pointed to the renewed popularity of the concept album (Wener 2006; Shute 2013), and this form of presentation remains especially important to the progressive rock and metal genres (see Burns and McLaren 2020; Burns and Armstrong 2021; Macan 1997; Borders 2001; Elicker 2001; Moore 2004; O'Donnell 2005; Lambert 2008; Holm-Hudson 2008; Spicer 2008; Letts 2010).

The broader paratextual content provided by the concept album is as important to the production of meaning as the music and lyrics, providing what Macan refers to as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*—a term originally coined by Richard Wagner in the nineteenth century to describe the unified artwork of his musical productions, in which “music, words, scenery, lighting and costume design” had equal importance (Macan 1997, 11). This is readily applied to progressive rock and metal artists whose albums often incorporate elaborate album sleeves, videos, and other media, with themes and symbols crossing over into their live presentation. It is certainly to be expected that music scholars will look primarily to the song content (words and music) in order to interpret concept albums, and as they receive and interpret these works, music analysts use a variety of methods to account for musical and lyrical connections, as well as to explore the overall messages and meanings that are communicated. Although this musicological inclination places the greatest analytic emphasis upon the musical content of a concept album, its paratextual elements are vital to the production of meaning. For instance, Tim Smolko (2013) spends considerable energy analyzing the lyrical content, artistic packaging, and live performances of Jethro Tull's *Thick as a Brick* (1972) in order to offer a more thorough examination of this concept album. Taking that approach even further, Phil Rose (2015) analyzes Pink Floyd's concept albums as multimedia artifacts and applies a range of theoretical techniques from literary, film, and psychology studies, in order to illustrate how the album materials work together to promote meanings and messages. Moreover, Lori Burns (2016) examined how the music, words, and images of Coldplay's *Mylo Xyloto* (2011) interrelate across a number of media texts to create a transmedia storyworld that communicates on a socio-cultural level. Consequently, these broader paratextual elements are also referred to by our contributors as relevant to their particular examples.

In keeping with narrative theorist David Herman (2009), we argue that listeners identify the various textual elements of the concept album and shape them into an understanding of the society (or storyworld) in which the story takes place—or, indeed, to refract their understanding of that storyworld upon the world in which they live. In this regard, Herman identifies worldmaking practices to be integral to the interpretation of cultural practices. By choosing musical works drawn from the genres of progressive rock and metal, our featured authors explore a wide range of cultural expressions, aesthetics, and styles, and engage critically and analytically with the discursive worldmaking potential of these text-based and text-influenced musical works. Rachel Carroll and Adam Hansen (2014) coined the term “litpop” to capture the interdisciplinary interest in the intersections between literature and popular music, and while their work does not connect with the genres under discussion

in this edited collection, our contributors are also interdisciplinary in nature. The book comprises a gathering of chapters written by leading and emerging scholars in a range of fields, including popular music studies, musicology, cultural studies, religious studies, literary studies, and sociology.

Within the broad field of popular music studies, Johan Fornäs (2003) writes about the multimodal entanglement between the words and music of popular songs and locates meaning in “acts of intersection between texts and subjects in specific contexts” (40). Indeed, the lyrics of popular music recordings have long been examined in terms of their connections to literature (Kruse 1990; Covach 1997) and to the expressive elements of word-music relationships (i.e., Bradby and Torode 1984; Griffiths 2003, 2013; Cohen and Street 2005; Nicholls 2007). Moving beyond the words and music relationship, the worldmaking strategies found in multimodal/transmedia works extend further into discursive contexts, spatial and temporal elements, subjectivity and consciousness, lived experience, and socio-cultural ideologies (for instance, see Abbott 2008; Dannenberg 2008; Herman 2009; Freeman 2017). Such storyworlds take the popular music album to a new level of mediation, as a larger narrative is developed within and across a range of media texts (including social media, videos and films, stage shows, graphic novels, and computer games), providing a tremendous breadth of scope for the album to spectacularize its cultural reach and to oil its audience-media engine (Wikström 2009).

Outline of the Book

The diversity of content included in this book establishes an impressive breadth and scope across the genres of progressive rock and metal, while also illuminating the many elements of cohesion that bind these progressive genres together. We have organized the 35 chapters into five broad sections: I. Theoretical Frameworks; II. Literary Adaptations; III. Mythologies and Folklores; IV. Storyworlds; and V. Subjectivities and Identities. The brief summary of each chapter offered below is meant to draw the reader through the rich collection of ideas, literary works, and musical references to be found in these pages.

Part I (Theoretical Frameworks) opens the collection with seven chapters that provide a range of theoretical foundations and their application to progressive rock and metal. To begin, Andy Bennett establishes the literary element as a principal attribute of progressive rock. Equal to the experimental developments in song structures and instrumentation, the integration of literary references provided a critical building block to the creation of an elevated compositional style. Discussing albums by a range of progressive rock bands from the late 1960s through to the early 1980s, Bennett distinguishes examples that were inspired by literary works from those that directly incorporated literary content. Chris Anderton then explores a specific focus on science fiction that emerged in the late 1960s, taking three perspectives identified by Isaac Asimov (“what if,” “if only,” and “if this goes on”) as a point of inquiry for the narratives of progressive rock. Offering potential for utopian and dystopian representations, Anderton transfers these sci-fi perspectives to the musical terms of progressive rock. He then explores three key terms for text-music correspondences (veering, versioning, and intertextuality) and three key strategies for the broad forms that shape text-music relations (adaptation, inspiration, and worldbuilding). John Covach addresses another unique and yet prevalent focus that emerged in the U.K. in the 1960s: hippie spirituality, especially as it is expressed in the lyrics by Jon Anderson of Yes, which were in turn inspired by leading literary figures. Covach identifies several common traits that are evident in Anderson’s body of lyrical writing, including the attention to political, social, and spiritual topics, as well as an orientation toward alternative spirituality and visionary tropes, which inspired comparable musical journeys.

Continuing with a focus on Yes, Jonathan C. Friedman offers a reflection on ideas developed by Jon Anderson from Marc Chagall's exploration of mystical Jewish themes. Although the 1982 recording was never officially released, Friedman analyzes songs by Anderson that were inspired by Chagall's work, available on a 1999 bootleg release. Through this study, he reveals aspects of Anderson's spirituality as it is expressed in themes from Jewish texts and represented in musical materials. As is evident in these two chapters on Jon Anderson, progressive rock lyricists of the 1970s sought to establish an erudite tone in their song texts. Leonardo Masi understands this authorial gravitas as an aspiration for the status of poet or prophet. Achieved through literary references to "classic" literature, divine and heroic topics, and reflective poetic subjects, the lyrical content of progressive rock positioned the musical subjectivity as earnestly serious. Masi shows, however, that humor, irony, and parody also enter the discourse to counter this trend and to point in new expressive and sometimes postmodern directions. In an effort to contextualize the topics and imaginative worlds associated with both progressive rock and metal lyrics, Nolan Stolz focuses specifically on Black Sabbath. Examining the lyrical content of their work through the perspectives of topic theory, musical style, and genre, Stolz illuminates the similarities between Sabbath's approach in the 1970s and that of contemporaneous progressive rock groups. These include particular lyrical themes (e.g., fantasy and mysticism, science fiction and space), writing styles (e.g., modernist, surrealist), and narrative structures (e.g., the development of narratives across multiple songs) that foreshadowed their later adoption into the progressive metal style of the late 1980s. To close Part I, Marcel Bouvrie offers a framework for understanding a widely used literary strategy in progressive rock and metal: the exploration of dystopian worlds. With his analysis organized around three aspects of the material content of a dystopian concept album (stylistic, thematic, and narratological), he illuminates three interwoven interpretive threads of dystopia (the political, the socio-cultural, and the technological). Working with three dystopian concept albums (by Dream Theater, Porcupine Tree, and The Alan Parsons Project), Bouvrie demonstrates how the analytic elements intersect with the interpretive threads.

Part II (Literary Adaptations) comprises a group of chapters that study specific musical adaptations of major literary works from a range of styles and eras. Attention is given to the techniques and strategies utilized in doing so, and to the slippages and creative adaptations that musicians have employed to tell their own versions of these stories, or how they have used them to comment on contemporary issues. Identifying J.R.R. Tolkien as a significant influence on progressive rock, Sarah Hill and Jon Gower provide important contexts for *The Lord of the Rings* and its creative bearing on rock music of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The authors focus on two adaptations, placing Donald Swann's song cycle of 1967 into dialogue with Bo Hansson's instrumental concept album of 1972. Their analyses raise questions about temporality, movement, and narrative scope in the musical handling of an epic literary work. Martin Ringsmut continues the Tolkien focus in his chapter on Blind Guardian's adaptation of *The Silmarillion*. Considering the concept album in relation to Tolkien's own ideas about fictional worldbuilding, Ringsmut understands *Nightfall in Middle Earth* as a "sounding extension" and a conceptual space for immersive listening. He also introduces the concept of intertextuality as a productive avenue for tracing the path of material references that communicate a story of war, fate, loss, and sorrow. Themes of war and loss carry into the subsequent chapter by Ryan Blakeley, who studies Camel's adaptation of Paul Gallico's novella, *The Snow Goose*. Blakeley explores the instrumental content as well as the album paratexts (e.g., images and liner notes, track titles), to show how these materials shape the listening experience. Identifying this work as an intermedial adaptation, he places the story's narrative elements into dialogue with structural musical features (form, harmony, meter, instrumentation) and thematic associations.

Kevin Holm-Hudson examines David Bedford's treatment of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, detailing how the mysterious eighteenth-century tale is evoked through Bedford's harmonic structures and sonic effects, as these are designed to invoke the uncanny. Through his analysis, Holm-Hudson also raises issues arising from the compositional integration of art music and progressive rock, ultimately understanding Bedford to reside in a liminal space somewhere between the two genres. Aleksandar Golovin selects Royal Hunt's two-album treatment of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, with a view not only to illuminating the literary narrative but also the Western art music influences throughout this dystopian progressive metal opera. The intersection between narrativity and classical style is examined through the lens of online audience reviews in combination with narrative theories for popular music that address the visual, textual, and musical elements. Turning to children's literature as a source for 1980s neo-progressive rock, Marion Brachet studies the work of Marillion and Pendragon to discover how literary and musical imaginations about childhood shape their concept albums. Artwork, lyrics, and music intersect to create a playful and nostalgic aesthetic and yet also at work are dramatic themes from the Romantic poets (e.g., Wordsworth, Rousseau, and Blake), such as the loss of innocence and philosophical pathways to adulthood. A precursor to the Romantics, the German "Sturm und Drang" poet, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, becomes the focus of the chapter by Lori Burns. Power metal band Kamelot ambitiously adapted *Faust*, Parts I and II in two respective concept albums that communicate the profound story and develop the complex layers of Faust's subjectivity, especially in relation to the figures of Mephisto and the two vitally important female characters, Gretchen and Helen. Bringing forward several key elements from Aristotle's *Poetics*, Burns frames the tragedy in its original dramatic form and in its development through the lyrical-musical structure and expression of the albums.

Part III (Mythologies and Folklores) examines the ways in which various mythologies, histories, folk tales, religious texts, and poetic sources have provided inspiration for progressive rock and metal artists. Richard Worth takes us back to medieval times through the music of Gentle Giant, a band often associated with medieval and renaissance aesthetics, and specifically with the folk elements of those eras. Arguing, in fact, that they treat medievalism as a "topic" within their music, Worth addresses the ways in which they develop lyrics, music, and album materials to reconstruct an old-world style. Also transferring ancient topics to the contemporary era, Milan Schaller studies the Finnish folk metal band Turisas, who take inspiration from Old Norse texts, including the *Kalevala*. Schaller immerses the reader in the epic saga of a warrior, en route to Constantinople; his journey is conveyed by the band through a complex intersection of lyrical, musical, cultural, and historical quotations and references that occur over the course of two concept albums. Traveling even deeper into history (the second millennium, BCE), János Fejes studies the myths of ancient Mesopotamia, specifically the *Enūma Eliš*, an ancient creation epic from Babylonia. Based on a large corpus study of song lyrics based on the *Enūma Eliš*, Fejes illuminates the mythological topics that emerge in metal songs, with the treatments falling into five categories: actualization, adaptation, extension, imaginary, and retelling.

Biblical content is the focus of Grigorios Mathioudakis' study of early power metal, in the work of the German band Helloween. Examining the band's biblical references in two albums from the 1980s, Mathioudakis reveals the use of allegory and the element of ironic ambivalence in the lyrics, artwork, and music by examining these modes of expression on three levels: historical, aesthetic, and ideological. Andrzej Mądro continues the focus on power metal in his study of literary topoi in the lyrics of the band Symphony X. As they draw upon the Orphic myth and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and add further references to literary works by Shakespeare and Poe, they create a musical work with deep connections to historical, cultural texts. Mądro pulls us into

the underworld to explore this representation of the Orpheus challenge that has inspired musical composition over the centuries. Returning to the work of Tolkien, Joshua B. Tuttle writes about two albums by Uriah Heep that explore mystical and fantastical elements, with a particular focus on *The Magician's Birthday* (1972). He draws on the narrative structure presented by Tolkien in his pre-war essay, "On Fairy-Stories" (1939). Following that narratological framework, Tuttle analyzes the complex layers of Uriah Heep's lyrical expression, addressing the forces of good and evil and the concepts of recovery, escape, and consolation. Owen Coggins fittingly closes Part III with an esoteric example of fantasy, religion, history, and mythology in the work of Slovakian band Remmirath, who blend progressive rock and black metal into an experimental integration of ideologies, politics, and narrative imaginaries. As Coggins refers to the multiple points of musical and literary references as a constellation, the chosen album explores the realm of UFO mythology.

Part IV (Storyworlds) delves into the worldmaking potential of progressive rock and metal bands who draw on literary devices and transmedia or cross-media elements in creating the storyworlds that underpin their musical productions. Opening this section, Alexander C. Harden draws upon cognitive narratology and the process of narrative sense-making as he examines Pink Floyd's development of a storyworld for the album *Animals* (1977), based on George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Harden demonstrates that the sonic, textual, and visual elements constitute a cross-media storyworld through which Pink Floyd is able to convey their social and political commentary. Taking us into a whimsical world created by Daevid Allen of Gong, Jay Keister examines the treatment of the absurd and nonsensical materials of *Radio Gnome Invisible*, a narrative that runs over three concept albums and explores the challenge of building narrative cohesion within collectively composed musical textures. While aspects of Allen's work are paradoxical, Keister also reveals how the concept albums ultimately deliver a mystical message of unity. Next, Jacob Holm-Lupo focuses on spatiality as an important aspect of musical worldmaking, with particular attention to two progressive rock songs produced by Trevor Horn (by Yes and The Art of Noise). Holm-Lupo argues that Horn's particular style of sonic space is inspired by liminality, as it is developed in the fiction of J. G. Ballard, and which can be interpreted as a semiotic marker for transitional spaces, passageways, and other zones of potentiality. Ivan Tan's chapter looks to another creative space where progressive rock can make a contribution: the worldbuilding of manga, and specifically Hirohiko Araki's *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* and its realization in the anime series, *Phantom Blood*. In his consideration of the relationship between progressive rock and literary works, Tan at first flips the script by examining how Araki incorporates progressive rock aesthetics to enhance his manga storytelling, and then considers how the musical influences in Araki's work are conveyed in the anime adaptation.

Turning to progressive metal, a genre characterized by the extended and complex song structures of progressive rock, intensified by greater heaviness, distortion, and instrumental virtuosity, Ciro Scotto demonstrates how the work of Dream Theater exemplifies the genre through these elements as well as an emphasis on storyworld creation. Their second concept album, *The Astonishing*, organized in two acts with a total of 34 song tracks, carries forward the progressive rock tradition of exploring dystopian and utopian ideals; Scotto integrates narrative content and musical structural elements to explore the narrative arc of this work. Elise Girard-Despraulex also brings forward the storytelling of a metal band, Avatar, who extend their narrative through the release of the album, music videos, and a "fable book" that offers illustrations and poems for each song. While the narrative becomes complex through this multimedia concept album, Girard-Despraulex finds that the storytelling is unified by the constant presence of the singer who embodies a clown in the role of narrator. Closing Part IV, Patrick Armstrong and Lori Burns demonstrate how Steven Wilson's transmedia storytelling, with longstanding collaborators Hajo

Müller (author and illustrator) and Jess Cope (videographer), leads to the creation of a video game in which the multimodal materials convey a hauntological narrative. Interpreting the soundtrack, which derives from a long list of Steven Wilson songs, including tracks from his ambient project, Bass Communion, Armstrong and Burns identify thematic, symbolic, and aesthetic attributes that emerge from the intertextual connections to the original recordings.

Part V (Subjectivities and Identities) closes the volume with a set of essays that advance our understanding of how literature and music can intersect to express and signify cultural values related to national and personal identities and subjectivities. David Pattie begins with Peter Gabriel's invocation of English themes and narratives in a number of works by Genesis, who uphold historical and literary attachments. In his critical examination, he finds that Genesis' representations of England are not always positive, but rather reflect on some of the more disconcerting and disturbing aspects of the British cultural imaginary that emerge in the canonical literature of authors such as William Blake, Henry James, and Charles Dickens. Another exploration of dystopian literature is presented by Philippe Gonin in his study of Roger Waters' work, beginning with his Pink Floyd period and continuing into his solo career. In his treatments of literature by authors such as R.D. Laing, George Orwell, and Henry Thoreau, Waters is received as having a balanced approach to alienation and justice, as he allows for both representations of oppression and resistance, while Gonin brings to the fore Waters' sensitivity toward human subjectivities and psychological states.

Israel Holas Allimant and Sergio Holas Véliz write about the Andean progressive rock concept album, *Las alturas de Machu Picchu*, by Los Jaivas, which is based on Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*, an epic poem that recounts Latin American history. The authors identify the album as emerging from Neruda's poetic commentary on Indigenous resistance, which Los Jaivas then extend to a Cold War lens in order to address their own experience of exile. Also considering the political implications for creative expression, Eduardo García Salueña traces the intersections between literature and music of Spanish progressive rock artists who were active during the Transition to democracy in Spain (following the death of the dictator General Franco). He examines the music of Bloque and Crack, bands that mobilize literary and musical strategies to convey societal values, including national identity, religion, and history. Mengyao Jiang focuses on the lyrical expression of two leading Chinese progressive rock bands, Utopian Daymare and Wood Pushing Melon, who compose their lyrics with a blend of Western literary themes (e.g., utopianism and escapism) and themes that arise from Chinese philosophies, folklore, and literary works. While the influence of Western concepts is evident, Jiang argues that Chinese progressive rock artists have carved out their own authentic space, and that they are not constrained by the Western influences that inspired their inception. The hybrid nature of Western and Asian culture is also critiqued by Akitsugu Kawamoto, who chooses works by Japanese novelist Ogai Mori and Japanese progressive rock band Shingetsu to illuminate issues of ambiguous identity that emerge in their words and music. Kawamoto argues, in fact, that we can only understand Japanese progressive rock in the contextual and historical background of this hybridity and the cultural memories that emerge from it. Closing the volume of 35 chapters, Nicole Biamonte and Jerry Cain take up the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* to demonstrate how the work of progressive metal band Tool comprises a postmodern manifestation of that concept through their integration of music, lyrics, artwork, and videos in a cohesive body of work. Their methodical approach to the analysis of musical features and lyrical themes is grounded in an understanding of both the band's collaborative compositional process and the resulting immersive spectator experience.

The breadth and diversity of the chapters presented in this book demonstrate not only the various ways in which the literary imagination has been actuated within progressive rock and metal

but also the many elements of cohesion that bind these broadly based genres together. It is clear that the lyrical and narratological aspects of these types of music may bear closer examination, and offer significant interpretative potential, not only in and of themselves, but also to our understanding of how the literary imagination can demonstrate contemporary cultural relevance. The enduring appeal of progressive rock and metal lies not only in its musical complexity but in the storyworlds and narratives that it evokes in its listeners, providing an experience that promotes detailed immersion and repeated listening.

Notes

- 1 The relationship between genre, style, and idiolect is the focus of Chris Anderton's article in the journal *Popular Music and Society* ("Reconfiguring"), in which he argues that the idiolects of specific bands may form exemplars around which certain of these subgenres have coalesced.
- 2 Examples include Saracen, Diamond Head, and Limelight—each included "progressive" aspects to their music, but are more typically associated with the NWOBHM tag. At the same time, there were hard rock and pomp rock artists in the U.K. in the late 1970s and early 1980s that were also incorporating progressive elements, including Nightwing and Magnum.
- 3 Fletcher and Umurhan (2020b, 3–4) refer to the field of "reception studies" (associated with Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser) in relation to the interpretation of ancient texts by later readers, since those later readers may not have a close personal knowledge of the original texts, but are instead reading specific translations or interpretations of those texts. This may well be layered further in the case of music, since the originating musicians are acting in an intermediary capacity, with the original source material refracted both at the composition stage and at the later stage of listening.

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PART I

Theoretical Frameworks



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1

MORE ERUDITE THAN YOUR AVERAGE ROCK BAND

Progressive Rock and Literature

Andy Bennett

In 1977, Canadian rock band Rush released their fifth studio album *A Farewell to Kings*. In what popular music history now records as the year of punk, *A Farewell to Kings* went against the grain, being Rush's most progressive rock-orientated album to date. With its title paraphrasing Ernest Hemingway's novel *A Farewell to Arms*, the album also extensively referenced Samuel Taylor Coleridge's epic poem "Kubla Khan" in the 11-minute, multi-sectioned track "Xanadu." Previously, Rush had also taken inspiration from writers including Ayn Rand and J.R.R. Tolkien in their music. In doing so, the band was drawing on a tradition already established in progressive rock, a genre that influenced Rush throughout much of the mid- to late-1970s. In 1972, the Genesis track "Watcher of the Skies" featured lyrics inspired by Arthur C. Clarke's novel *Childhood's End*, while the title of the song is taken from a poem by John Keats. Yes' 1972 "Close to the Edge" was based on Hermann Hesse's novel *Siddhartha*, while two years later, Yes keyboard player Rick Wakeman released a concept album titled after and based on Jules Verne's science fiction novel *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. Progressive rock's associations with literature continued in the 1980s when Marillion, one of the bands at the forefront of the U.K. neo-prog movement (Ahlkvist 2011), based their name on J.R.R. Tolkien's book *The Silmarillion*.

Together with its use of classical and jazz influences, including complex time signatures and extended instrumental passages, progressive rock's use of literary references in its song lyrics, song and album titles, and even in band names, became a means of marking the genre as distinctive from other rock and pop genres. Emerging during an era of album-orientated rock pioneered by artists such as the Beatles (Bennett 2020), progressive rock musicians and their audience inscribed within progressive rock an intellectual discourse that presented it as a "thinking person's music." Adopting a stance akin to the critical theory of writers such as Adorno and Horkheimer, progressive rock artists and their followers saw in progressive rock a music that challenged the formula of the three-minute chart song with its apparently predictable song structure and equally predictable lyrics. This chapter examines how progressive rock artists' use of literature was equally as important as the use of complex song structures (often featuring a sequence of different time signatures) in defining progressive rock as a unified genre despite the wide-ranging styles of the various artists associated with the genre (Anderton 2010). It will also discuss how the use of literary sources helped to present progressive rock as a subversive musical scene during the 1970s and early 1980s. As part of the chapter's examination of progressive rock's use of literary references in songs, it

will be shown how such use assumes two distinctive trends. In the first, literature is used as an inspirational resource for the writing of lyrics that make reference to, but do not engage in, a direct adaptation of literary works in music. By contrast, the second trend draws more directly on literary sources as a structural frame for the writing of lyrics.

Speaking in Eloquent Tongues: Progressive Rock and the Literary Turn

The always loosely defined style of music that was to eventually adopt the term progressive rock emerged during a period of significant change in popular music at the end of the 1960s. With the release of their concept album *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in June 1967, the Beatles established a critical new template for how many popular music artists came to regard songwriting and the practice of recording (see Martin 1979). *Sgt Pepper* signaled that songs need not necessarily conform to a three-minute format based around a verse-chorus-middle eight structure and equally signaled that song lyrics need not reflect mundane, everyday themes but could be abstract in content and streams of consciousness-like in delivery. Artists such as Bob Dylan and Frank Zappa were also important in this respect, further emphasizing the fact that song lyrics need not serve merely as sonic window dressing but could convey their own deeper meaning and significance. Two years later, the Beatles' final recording, *Abbey Road* (1969), continued the trend of musical and lyrical experimentation, with the album's B-side containing a long medley (17:45) comprising a series of fragments from songs that Lennon and McCartney had individually been working on and that were essentially "unfinished." These song fragments were segued together to produce an intriguing sequence of tempo, pitch, and mood changes that left the listener with no clear idea as to how the piece would progress, nor when and how it would end (see Zak 2023). The song fragments in the medley were overlaid with lyrics that often appeared as streams of consciousness; bizarre and often satirical accounts of characters and situations that drew on a tendency toward abstract lyrics the Beatles had begun to introduce in their music as far back as their 1966 album *Revolver*. In the same year that the Beatles released *Abbey Road*, a new generation of bands including Yes, Genesis, and King Crimson released debut albums that set the scene for how the Beatles' nod toward the avant-garde in their later recordings would be drawn on as a creative template during the following decade. As the 1970s dawned, a particular style of lyrical prowess, just as much as the virtuosic quality of their music, provided a distinctive edge for these and other bands establishing the basis for what music critics would come to term progressive rock. If the lyrical imagery used by such bands frequently drew on works of literature, then the priming of this body of work for use in progressive rock's creative arsenal emerged from a distinctive aspect of British society and culture, specifically, the education system which at the time adopted an 11+ selection system giving high achievers the opportunity to attend grammar school as a pathway to university and professional careers (Tomlinson 1991).

It has been reported in various studies of progressive rock (see, for example, Macan 1997; Martin 1998) that what separated progressive rock from earlier, and indeed parallel, chapters in the history of British popular music was its exclusively middle-class qualities. A similar interpretation has been made regarding progressive rock audiences, notably in the work of Willis (1978), where a complex homological reading is presented to explain middle-class hippies' ability to appreciate the complex musical structures and astute, often abstract lyrics of progressive rock, this resulting from their inherited social and cultural capital, higher education background, and knowledge in the use of recreational soft drugs such as cannabis and popular hallucinogenics of the time, including LSD. More recent research has suggested a more diverse audience for progressive rock (see Bennett 2000) while the British prog revival of the early 1980s revealed that progressive

rock's influence extended beyond middle-class musicians and indeed beyond England. It is also fair to note that several prominent artists in the first wave of progressive rock, including Yes vocalist Jon Anderson, originated from working-class backgrounds and had no formal academic qualifications. Nevertheless, there was certainly a greater prevalence of middle-class musicians in progressive rock bands, with the first line-up of Genesis having formed at Charterhouse, an elite boys' school in the county of Surrey (part of a region of southeast England known as the "home counties"). Such details were not lost on the U.K. music press, who would sometimes comment on what they perceived as the odd combination of public-school alumni performing rock music (see Bennett 2020). Several years earlier, the "Canterbury Sound" (see Draganova et al. 2021) band Soft Machine (whose name was taken directly from the title of a 1961 book by American novelist William S. Burroughs) had also featured a line-up of whom several members had met at Simon Langton Grammar School for Boys in the city of Canterbury in southeast England. However, Soft Machine faced less antagonism from the U.K. music press given they were more rooted in jazz than rock, jazz having an established middle-class audience in England at this time (Stump 1997).

The point remains, however, that in contrast to the post-war popular music genres that had appeared before it, progressive rock drew on a series of resources that had hitherto been considered the preserve of the elite classes, including works of literature. This was undoubtedly due to the fact that literature was a staple of the British grammar school curriculum as part of an education that primarily prepared its students for a degree course in higher education. Books included in English literature courses taught at English grammar schools included plays by William Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, and novels by a diverse range of writers including Jane Austen, Thomas Hardy, and E.M. Forster. Additionally, works of poetry from, among others, John Keats, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge were also popular inclusions in English literature courses of the time. As a genre, however loosely defined it was to remain, progressive rock consciously set out to demarcate itself from more chart-orientated popular music, building on a tradition established by rock music during the late 1960s (Bennett 2019). In this sense, the lyrical tropes of progressive rock were as integral to the distinction progressive rock bands sought to establish between themselves and their pop peers as their music. And in this sense, access to literature and a literary appreciation via education was certainly an important factor for progressive rock artists and their audiences alike. Furthermore, many of those studying at grammar schools would later go on to higher education during an era when colleges and universities in the U.K., as in other countries, were fertile breeding grounds for countercultural ideology, the latter also being inspired to a significant degree by works of literature by authors such as J.R.R. Tolkien, Carlos Castaneda, and Hermann Hesse, as well as works of poetry and philosophy (Nelson 1989).

During the 1950s and for the first part of the 1960s, popular music lyrics had tended to focus on mundane, everyday themes, typically those related to teenage love and romance. In an early sociological study of the meaning of popular music lyrics, Horton (1957) claimed that a primary function of pop lyrics was to express for teenagers the feelings and sentiments they were afraid to express themselves. Certainly, there was little deviation from this convention in pop lyric writing, a quality which, together with the often-formulaic nature of pop songs proffered by songwriters and "hit factories" such as Tin Pan Alley (Shepherd 1982), gave rise to critical readings of popular music as a means—along with print media, television, and cinema—of mass media control of audiences. This was most famously espoused by Adorno (1941), who argued that while art music sought to challenge the interpretive powers of its audience, pop music left little to the imagination and thus served to dumb down audiences, turning them into empty vessels for the passive reception of "pre-digested" music that effectively did the hearing *for* the listener. Academically speak-

ing, Adorno's work has been challenged by active audience theorists (see, for example, Ang 1996; Jenkins 2012) who have argued for the more active and interpretive qualities of the audience when engaging with popular culture texts. Less considered, though, is the extent to which a perceived blandness in popular music on the part of some artists and their audiences may have led to a form of everyday critical theorizing that sought to stage its own deviation from a perceived pop plasticity. In this instance, however, the objective was not to reject popular music out of hand in favor of art music, but rather to take inspiration from art music in a refashioning of popular music that aimed to subvert traditional pop formats and infuse composition, performance, and listening with a new level of intellectual challenge (something that U.S. artists such as Frank Zappa were also engaged in, see Greene 2016). Within this, the lyrical scope of songwriting was also of paramount importance. Creating music with sufficient depth to work in a challenging, sometimes transcendental, fashion also meant writing lyrics that rejected the established tropes of three-minute pop songs and drew on other influences, which, in the case of progressive rock, also encompassed literary works. Indeed, to return momentarily to the study of literature in grammar schools, in addition to reading the works themselves, such study also involved critical scrutiny of literary devices, such as alliteration, simile, hyperbole, symbolism, metaphor, and personification. Knowledge of such devices and how to identify them in writing allowed the reader to understand that literature, as with other forms of creative and performing art, could be used in a way that conveyed abstract meaning or perhaps a series of meanings that it was up to the reader to interpret and understand as part of their critical appreciation of a literary text.

In essence, adopting literary techniques and devices allowed the songwriter a significant degree of creative license when crafting lyrics. Most importantly, just as song formats themselves could be expanded to explore different sounds, textures, and tempos, song lyrics could similarly explore different scenarios, moods, and experiences. Lyrics were no longer tasked simply with the job of telling a succinct, linear, and familiar story. Rather, they could delve into the abstract, including realms of fantasy and metaphysics. Stories could be told over the course of a song lasting anything up to 20 minutes (the typical length of one side of a vinyl album). The context of a story could be the (quasi)historical past, a possible (often dystopian) future, a different planet, a fantasy world, or a parallel universe. Popular clichés of progressive rock, as these would later surface during the punk era, branded it, for example, as “sword and sorcery” music. To a significant extent, such readings sought to convey a sense in which progressive rock was little more than the perceived excessiveness and bombast of high art set to music. A more balanced perspective, however, would be to argue that progressive rock drew on high art, including literature, as a resource in creating its own artistic statements. Thus, in explaining the inspiration for their more abstract lyrics, progressive rock artists would often claim to have been inspired by works of literature and to use these works as a resource for the writing of lyrics (see, for example, Brodsky 2019).

Watchers of the Skies

This inspirational quality of literature in the writing of progressive rock lyrics was graphically illustrated in 1972 with the release of two tracks, “Close to the Edge” by Yes and “Watcher of the Skies” by Genesis. Each of these tracks is now considered to be a classic example of the progressive rock genre. “Close to the Edge,” from the album of the same name, is a track of 18 minutes’ duration written by Yes members Jon Anderson (lead vocals) and Steve Howe (guitar) and takes up the whole of the original vinyl album’s first side. Apparently, Anderson’s first lyrical inspiration came from reading J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (Brodsky 2019) but as ideas were developed, Anderson took the decision to base the theme and lyrics of the song around German

writer Hermann Hesse's 1922 novel *Siddhartha* (Covach 1997). The strongest point of commonality between "Close to the Edge" and *Siddhartha* is the use of imagery based around the "river." In both song and novel, the river serves as a focal point of spiritual inspiration that primes a state of transcendentalism leading to enlightenment for both the character of Siddhartha in Hesse's novel and the unspecified subject of "Close to the Edge." Compared to the more literal depictions of novels and poems evident in other examples of progressive rock songs (as discussed later in this chapter), "Close to the Edge" could best be described as drawing on the fictionalized script of a novel as a means through which to create a new text that individual listeners could apply to themselves. At the time of its release, the ideas and discourses promoted by the hippie counterculture (Roszak 1969) were still in broad circulation among the rock and progressive rock scenes. Notions of spiritualism and transcendentalism were core to countercultural beliefs (Hall 2016). Reich's (1971) *The Greening of America*, published the year before the release of "Close to the Edge," took such ideas to a new level of critical reasoning by suggesting that they could lay the foundations of a new form of consciousness among countercultural youth, which Reich referred to as Consciousness III. Many at the time believed that music was a key medium in promoting a message of alternative consciousness, that would ultimately lead to the creation of a new "rock community" (Frith 1981). This had been stoically proclaimed in 1969 by Woodstock co-organizer Michael Lang, who went on record in the movie *Woodstock* as suggesting that the message of the new consciousness was in the music being performed at the festival (Bennett 2004). With such events and writings in the recent past, it was a relatively easy step for progressive rock artists such as Jon Anderson to use literary resources, particularly those that already resonated closely with the countercultural ethos, to further promote such messages.

A similar example of works of literature, or rather literature and poetry in this particular case, providing inspiration for progressive rock lyric writing is seen in the case of Genesis. In 1972, Genesis released their fourth album, *Foxrot*. The album begins with the song "Watcher of the Skies," a seven-and-a-half-minute track that would become a live favorite and set opener during original singer Peter Gabriel's time with the band. The song's title was inspired by poet John Keats' 1817 work "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," and specifically the line: "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies." Written by Genesis members Mike Rutherford and Tony Banks, the lyrics of "Watcher of the Skies" depict how an empty earth would appear to an extra-terrestrial visitor. To that end, the song's lyrics are also inspired by British novelist Arthur C. Clarke's 1953 novel *Childhood's End*. In particular, the closing segment of the novel, when one of the story's human protagonists, Jan Rodricks, returns to Earth following a visit to a distant alien planet. Rodricks has been away from Earth for 80 years. Upon his return, he finds the Earth largely deserted except for an advanced race of human children. Here, the narrative of *Childhood's End* resonates keenly with the lyrics of "Watcher of the Skies," which refer to the end of the human race's long time on the Earth. Parallels continue. While in the novel Rodricks watches the advanced race of humans lifting into the sky and leaving a dying Earth, so the lyrics of "Watcher of the Skies" describe the Earth abandoned following an apparent human exodus to the stars. Genesis was not the only progressive rock band of the 1970s to take inspiration from Clarke's novel. The lyrics of Pink Floyd's 1972 track "Childhood's End" and Van der Graaf Generator's "Childlike Faith in Childhood's End," released in 1976, were also inspired by Clarke's writing. Again, however, the literary reference here essentially begins and ends with the reference to the title of the novel. In Pink Floyd's "Childhood's End," lyrical references to being alone beneath the sky have a vague association with the novel from which inspiration for the song title is drawn, but the song itself is more squarely focused on a quest to find oneself in the face of harsh everyday challenges, this being a staple of Pink Floyd's song lyrics throughout much of the band's career. The same

can be said of “Cymbaline,” a 1970 Pink Floyd song that takes its name directly from a play by Elizabethan playwright William Shakespeare. Although the lyrics vaguely intimate calling to the Shakespearean King, references to contemporary themes such as tube trains and the science fiction character Dr. Strange indicate that the image of Cymbaline is being drawn on as a resource in a rich word play that, if anything, juxtaposes the benevolent character of Cymbaline as a fictional seventeenth-century king with the demands placed on latter-day celebrities by managers and agents.

Prisoners of the Lost Xanadu

If in some cases progressive rock bands used literature in a more indirect way to craft song lyrics and creative narratives that frequently took an original twist, in other cases, the use of literary references was more apparent and direct, with song lyrics being more closely based on the texts that had inspired them. Two pertinent examples of this are seen in some of the work of Canadian band Rush and British band Marillion.

Rush differed from other progressive rock bands in several ways. In addition to being from North America, the members of Rush all came from blue-collar rather than middle-class, or a mix of middle-class and working-class, backgrounds. Also, rather than beginning as a progressive rock outfit, Rush transitioned to the genre following a six-year period as a bar band whose musical repertoire comprised original songs that drew on blues-rock and hard-rock influences along with cover versions of songs by artists including The Who, The Yardbirds, and Cream.¹ Nor were Rush to remain a progressive rock band, embracing reggae, new wave, and synth-pop styles during the early 1980s in ways that saw the band evolve musically while remaining broadly within the rock genre (Bennett 2018). Rush’s progressive rock era during the 1970s came with the recruitment of a new drummer, Neil Peart, who was an avid reader of literature and well acquainted with a number of classic literary works including J.R.R. Tolkien and Canadian novelist Ayn Rand. Peart quickly became the main lyricist for Rush at a point where the band also began to draw on musical influences from progressive rock bands, notably Yes and Genesis (McDonald 2009). An early example of Peart’s literary influence was heard on Rush’s 1975 songs “Anthem” and “Rivendell” from the band’s second album, *Fly By Night*. The lyrics of “Anthem” are based closely on the Ayn Rand novella of the same name and deal with the plight of the individual to strive for what they believe in and live the life they choose to live. The song “Rivendell” also closely mirrors the literary source it draws on in terms of imagery and meaning. Named after and directly referring to the place of sanctuary depicted in J.R.R. Tolkien’s novels *The Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954), “Rivendell” describes the experiences of an unspecified character—an apparently weary traveler—who finds peace and respite in this place of sanctuary. Peart’s lyrical description of Rivendell in the song closely resembles Tolkien’s original description in *The Hobbit*. As such, Peart’s intention was not to use the novel as a basis to create a new narrative, but rather to base the song around Tolkien’s fictional account of “Rivendell.” As Rush further developed their progressive rock style during the mid-1970s, Peart’s lyrics continued to draw on themes from the literature he was reading at the time. Rush’s breakthrough album *2112*, released in 1976, features a side long title track (duration 20:34) whose multi-sectioned concept-driven approach is modeled on earlier progressive rock pieces such as the Genesis track “Supper’s Ready” (1972) and the Yes epic “Gates of Delirium,” which takes up the first side of the band’s 1974 *Relayer* album. For the track’s lyrics, Peart again drew on Ayn Rand’s novella *Anthem*, this time adopting more of *Anthem*’s central story about a protagonist in a future Dark Age who rediscovers electricity and adapts this to tell the story of a person in a similarly dystopian future who rediscovers music when he inadvertently discovers a discarded guitar behind a waterfall in a cave and learns how to play

it. While the protagonist in *Anthem* (referred to by Rand as Equality 7-251) takes his discovery to the World Council of Scholars, in “2112,” Peart’s anonymous protagonist takes the guitar (and the music he has learned to play on it) to the Priests of the Temples of Syrinx. In both *Anthem* and “2112,” the protagonist’s discovery is dismissed, and they are punished for their act of attempting to bring something new into the world by a world order that rejects progress. Such was the proximity of the story told in *Anthem* to that related in Peart’s lyrics on “2112” that he took the decision to credit the inspiration he took from Rand’s work to avoid legal action. However, perhaps Peart’s closest reading of a literary work in his own lyrics appears in the song “Xanadu,” an 11-minute track appearing on Rush’s 1977 album *A Farewell to Kings* (an album title that itself drew directly on Ernest Hemingway’s 1929 novel *A Farewell to Arms*). As with “2112,” musically speaking “Xanadu” contains many references to early 1970s songs by Yes (notably “Soon,” the closing segment of “Gates of Delirium”) and Genesis, whose tracks “The Cinema Show” (1973) and “Eleventh Earl of Mar” (1976) contain elements highly reminiscent of particular sections of music in “Xanadu.” Lyrically, the song takes inspiration in a very direct way from English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s epic 1816 poem “Kubla Khan.” Incorporating imagery drawn directly from Coleridge’s original verses, Peart’s lyrics, phrased in the first person, describe how the legend of Xanadu becomes the basis of a real-life search for it by the song’s unnamed, apparently latter-day protagonist who learns of Xanadu from an old book. Obsessed by Kubla Khan’s pleasure dome and the paradise they assume Xanadu to be, the fate of the protagonist eventually mirrors that of Kubla Kahn. Having found and become trapped within the “pleasure dome” for eternity, the protagonist is forced to the realization that the fantasy and reality of their goal are quite different. In this sense, Peart takes the fateful story of Coleridge’s character Kubla Kahn and transforms it into a contemporary parable of wish fantasies becoming all-encompassing to the extent that they effectively enslave individuals.

Another progressive rock band whose literary inspiration took a more direct form is English group Marillion. Formed in 1979, in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, Marillion took its name from J.R.R. Tolkien’s book *The Silmarillion* (published posthumously in 1977). Although Marillion have enjoyed a long career (at the time of writing the band is still recording and performing), sustaining the departure of original vocalist and lyricist Fish in 1988 to be replaced by a new vocalist Steve Hogarth, and undergoing several changes in musical style, a cult favorite among early fans of the band remains “Grendel,” a 17:15 minute song that appears as a B-side on the 12-inch version of Marillion’s debut single “Market Square Heroes” (1982). In literature, Grendel is a character in the Old English epic poem *Beowulf*. The author of *Beowulf* is unknown, and its date of writing disputed (with experts only being able to ascertain that the poem was written sometime between 700 and 1000 AD). Set in Scandinavia during the sixth century, *Beowulf* depicts how the character of Beowulf, a legendary hero, assists Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, by slaying Grendel, a monster that has been attacking his kingdom. In 1971, John Gardner, an American author, published the novel *Grendel*. In the novel, Gardner reinterprets parts of the *Beowulf* poem from the perspective of the Grendel character. To this, Gardner added ideas drawn from Western philosophy, most centrally the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. As such, the voice of Grendel in Gardner’s novel becomes a means through which to critically comment on the key ideas of Sartre. Inspired by Gardner’s novel, Marillion’s song “Grendel” also tells its story from the point of view of the monster. However, rather than engaging with Gardner’s critical commentary on Sartre, the song “Grendel” is instead an account of the monster’s views of Hrothgar’s kingdom as a place beset by greed and the lust for victory of rival tribes. In that sense, “Grendel” could also at some level be seen as a critical commentary on a contemporary world beset by economic rivalry, corruption, and exploitation. Such themes were also explored in “Market Square Heroes” and other early 1980s

tracks by Marillion such as “Garden Party” (1983). Significantly, however, “Grendel,” despite its cult status, has been largely sidelined by both Marillion and original vocalist Fish and also marks something of a watershed moment in the history of progressive rock from first- to second-generation artists associated with the genre. Thus, upon its release in 1982, critics remarked on the stylistic proximity of the song to the work of early Genesis and particularly the 1972 epic track “Supper’s Ready.” Conscious of such critical commentary, Marillion opted not to feature the track in concert after 1983, adopting a more commercial and less progressive rock-based sound for future albums including *Misplaced Childhood* (1986), which contained two U.K. top 20 hits. It is notable in this respect that other progressive rock artists, including first-generation bands such as Genesis and Yes, also abandoned their progressive rock styles, including literature-inspired lyrics, during the 1980s as their songs became more commercial and chart focused (Bennett 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the significance of literature as a resource in the crafting of progressive rock lyrics from progressive rock’s initial emergence during the late 1960s to the second-generation progressive rock bands of the late 1970s and early 1980s. It has explored how progressive rock artists have drawn on literature in two distinctive ways in their lyric writing. Thus, some artists drew on works of literature as a means of inspiring their own writing of more abstract lyrics which, along with the ambitious musical styles of early progressive rock bands, were designed to act against the perceived predictability of chart-based popular music and, in doing so, provide intellectual challenge for their audience. In other cases, progressive rock artists have adopted a more direct approach to the use of literary sources, essentially taking the core storyline of a literary text and using this as a basis for a song’s lyrics.

Note

- 1 In 2004, Rush released an EP entitled *Feedback* containing cover versions of eight songs by artists that had inspired them as young musicians. Tracks featured on the EP include “Heart Full of Soul” (The Yardbirds), “For What It’s Worth” (Buffalo Springfield), and “The Seeker” (The Who).

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