

## BOOK REVIEWS / COMPTES RENDUS DE LIVRES

Kearney, Mary Celeste. 2017. *Gender and Rock*. New York: Oxford University Press. 363pp.

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For a while, I had been thinking that what we feminist popular music scholars really need is a book about gender and popular music that brings together and surveys the existing research. So I was delighted when I heard about Kearney's new book. *Gender and Rock* is a cultural studies textbook aimed at undergraduate students and accessible to media, cultural studies, and sociology students. Popular music students would also find the textbook very useful, although it is aimed at those who have never studied popular music before. Kearney argues that when it comes to rock, a cultural studies approach is suitable because rock is more than just the music. It is a culture, a discourse, and part of ideology.

Central to the book is the argument that gender *always* matters when we think about rock music — without a discussion of gender, our understanding of rock music is partial and reliant on biased viewpoints. Typically, this is how rock music has been approached by the press and by much academic work on the genre. Kearney therefore provides a very welcome counterweight to the dominating perspective on rock. Taking nothing for granted, Kearney includes a Butlerian theorization of gender and adopts a feminist perspective throughout the book. She builds on the work of a multitude of other

popular music researchers such as Mavis Bayton (1998) and Sara Cohen (1997) to argue that rock music is male dominated. Through use of examples, she shows how the industry (male dominated) and cultural context (masculinist) of rock work to maintain patriarchal relations within the genre. At the same time, Kearney uses previously overlooked examples which challenge the hegemonic view of rock as white man's music. She brings to light the black women involved in the origins of rock and also the numerous ways that women and LGBTQ musicians, industry workers, and fans have challenged rock's gender norms. This is very important work.

The book is organized into five sections, the final three of which can be linked to a producer-text-consumer triad: first, an overview of the differing approaches to studying rock music; second, a historical view of the genesis of rock music as an industry; third, music education, technology, and life on the road; fourth, musical texts, including videos and artwork; and fifth, the listeners and the critics. The chapters in each section advance the argument about rock's male dominance while also challenging it. Additionally, each chapter provides methodological tools for studying rock culture. For example, in the chapter on lyrics, Kearney outlines some of the main approaches to literary criticism and gives examples of research that have used these approaches. She also details their findings and critically addresses how they add to a critical perspective on rock culture. At the end of each chapter, there are ques-

tions and tasks to get students thinking about the chapter content and to apply theoretical ideas to different aspects of rock culture: in the chapter on rock musicians' roles and training, Kearney asks the reader to go beyond the library, to learn an instrument and start their own band. In doing so, she calls on them to reflect on the gender push-and-pull factors in those processes. I love the idea that students can start a band and reflect on their own position and thinking in the process as part of their learning. In asking the reader to fulfil this task, Kearney reveals her riot grrrl philosophy as she implies that everyone *can* (and wants to) make music.

I particularly enjoyed the final chapter of the book, as it delivers strong critical evidence for *why* rock is perceived as the preserve of white men and the problems caused by male dominance in writing about rock. The chapter gives an overview of different forms of rock criticism: commercial and trade magazines, fanzines and blogs, and academic criticism. Kearney illuminates the male domination of rock criticism and draws on research by Kembrew McLeod (2002) and Helen Davies (2001) on how rock criticism maintains a phallogocentric approach (i.e. that language privileges patriarchal meanings). Kearney tentatively suggests that such an approach could be read as a response to the incursions of women and queer folk into rock culture, but she doesn't push this point too hard. She discusses the many ways in which women have gone their own way in rock criticism as a response to the marginalization they have faced from editors and other rock critics. While rock may be white male dominated and masculinist, there are numerous ways in which women and queer folk are mak-

ing and writing about rock music. Rock is a heterogeneous genre and culture, and it is important that this is recognized — which Kearney does.

Overall, the book offers an excellent discursive overview of the broad rock genre as it functions in North America and the UK. Kearney, who has been writing about gender and rock for over 25 years, engages thoroughly with relevant research, providing a good roadmap for students to delve more deeply into the aspects of rock culture that interest them. If I am to be critical, there is little discussion of the major changes to the industry produced by streaming and online content. And, as a metal scholar, I was disappointed to see Kearney relying on stereotypical views of metal. For example, she argues that Judas Priest brought rock's iconic leather look from biker style. But, as Clifford-Napoleone identifies, the leather came from singer Rob Halford's participation in gay clubs (2015). This misunderstanding of metal and leather is at odds with the otherwise very good discussion of LGBTQ transgressive approaches to rock. If Kearney envisages a second edition, I recommend that she incorporate Clifford-Napoleone's research. That said, those interested in metal will still find the book a valuable primer since the origins and gender values of rock are integral to metal too.

I remain delighted that Kearney has written *Gender and Rock*; I am already recommending it to my students. 🌟

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Atkinson, David. 2018. *The Ballad and its Pasts: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory*. Rochester, NY: D.S. Brewer. 242 pp.

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David Atkinson reads lots of books: the text, footnotes, and bibliography of his latest book, *The Ballad and its Pasts: Literary Histories and the Play of Memory*, reveal the amount of data he brings to bear in suggesting expanded ways of thinking about the ballad, especially the ballad's connections with the past. His remarks are cogent and learned; they demand consideration.

Atkinson does not forget received ideas, whether real or imagined, including

the favourite early view that ballads were ancient national poetry. Following the available data (while admitting the need for fuller and more sequential data), he provides an expansive view that the ballad is a simple and persistent literary form that looks to the past even when newly minted: "Its weapons are the sword, the pen-knife, and the flintlock pistol, its modes of transport the horse and the sailing ship, its social structures (loosely speaking) feudal, its language formulaic and inclining towards the archaic" (7). Further, he says ballads are a "dynamic culture of cheap verse literature and song" (ix). He looks especially to English and Scottish materials from the 16th century to the early 20th century, before World War I. Most of the texts (and he focuses on the text rather than the music) eschew modernity; they provide what might be called a conservative perspective, looking to the past even when the subject could be contemporary. Sometimes the words — the narrative foci — are medievalized, somehow formed to seem old.

Atkinson takes from the data and received ideas what seems useful: he recognizes the persistence of the metrical and narrative patterns; he sees multiplicity whether texts were passed on orally or by print; and he finds no authoritative text. Implicitly, he questions Cecil Sharp's paradigm: continuity, variation, and selection based on the assumption of oral tradition. Stressing the role of print and, toward the later period, the pull of literacy, Atkinson sees discontinuity. Rather than valorizing the ballads from the past, his view is more catholic: in Chapter 5 he looks at a variety of texts dealing with the sinking of the *Ramillies*, as well as "one of the most famous of all ballads" (and a per-