

ÉTAT PRÉSENT

FRENCH CHANSON

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What is French *chanson*? In an article published by *L'Express* in March 2010, in anticipation of that year's *Victoires de la musique* ceremony,¹ the journalist Gilles Médioni addresses this question. His answer suggests there is more to *chanson* than just the broad idea of 'words set to music' that the term can sometimes signify:

C'est à la fois des rimes riches, de la poésie musicale, une vision du monde. Et son contraire: du vent, du rien, du toi + moi. Mais c'est bien sous le même terme générique que se rassemblent les artistes. Protéiforme, la chanson française se démarque des autres (italienne, espagnole, anglo-saxonne...) parce qu'elle évoque des thèmes souvent inattendus. Et le champ des possibles est illimité.²

¹ This is the annual ceremony held in February each year at which the French Ministry of Culture presents the Victoire awards to recognize outstanding achievement in the popular music industry.

² Gilles Médioni, 'C'est quoi une chanson française?', *L'Express*, 5 March 2010, <http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/musique/c-est-quoi-une-chanson-francaise_853099.html> [accessed 19 July 2017].

His definition resonates with a broader, well-established discourse about *chanson* that is the product of media texts, critical commentaries, album reviews, music-industry material, and fan contributions. Taken as a whole, this discourse suggests that there is a more specific meaning to the term *chanson* than simply ‘popular song’ or ‘words set to music’, for it stresses that it is a particular genre with its own set of ‘rules’. ³ It holds that *chanson* is a quality, crafted, and even artistic form of popular music; that it is a ‘literary genre, a form of poetry set to music, with claims for high-cultural status’; possesses ‘educational and enlightening qualities and [is] able to improve its audience, thus making art available to the masses’; that it represents the feelings and world view of its listeners through the persona of the singer-songwriter; and that it constitutes ‘a universal cultural product, appealing to all (within France at least)’. ⁴ The elements of this discourse that can be seen in the extract from Médioni include: the reference to the genre as poetry; its ineffable richness; the particular worldview it offers; its indefinable, immeasurable qualities such as those of ‘rien’ and ‘vent’;

³ The notion of ‘genre rules’ within popular music was defined by musicologist Franco Fabbri and refers to the ‘types of rules that contribute to the definition of a [musical] genre’ that are a product of the constitutive discourse of the genre, and which then affect the ways in which both the musical genre and its rules are accepted by various communities. See Franco Fabbri, ‘A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications’, in *Popular Music Perspectives*, ed. by David Horn and Philip Tagg (Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music, 1982), pp. 52–81 (p. 52), and online at <http://www.francofabbri.net/files/Testi_per_Studenti/ffabbri81a.pdf> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁴ Rachel Haworth, *From the Chanson française to the Canzone d’autore in the 1960s and 1970s: Authenticity, Authority, Influence* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 45–46.

and the unexpected themes that it explores. The lack of further definition or more precise explanation of these ideas is also characteristic of the discourse, and points to the multiple meanings that the term *chanson* can embody.

This multiplicity, or indeed polymorphousness of the genre has been highlighted by scholars of *chanson*. David Looseley has analysed the ‘promiscuous use’ of the term *chanson*,⁵ and Peter Hawkins has observed:

Chanson is not just a popular variety of poetry, not just a commercial product of the mass media industry, not just a reflection of popular taste, nor even a variety of folk-song. [...] Precisely because of its ambiguous, hybrid status, and despite its apparent naturalness, *chanson* is a deceptive and elusive phenomenon. This elusiveness is of course part of the fascination, and one of the main reasons for writing about it.⁶

Here, Hawkins highlights various significant elements of *chanson* discourse which govern how the genre is perceived and received. These in turn have informed the various approaches to the study of *chanson* that have been adopted by scholars. Indeed, critical studies of French *chanson* have developed considerably in recent decades and one of the strengths of the field is the diversity of approaches adopted. *Chanson* has been variously analysed as: poetry or, more broadly, text; a popular music product; an artefact that contributes to and through which to read the cultural history of France; a means by which to examine the country’s

⁵ David Looseley, *Popular Music in Contemporary France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2003), p. 81.

⁶ Peter Hawkins, *Chanson: The French Singer-Songwriter from Aristide Bruant to the Present Day* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), p. 4.

contemporary socio-cultural context; and a lens through which to explore the French socio-political landscape. The present essay discusses these diverse approaches as a means of tracking the development of *chanson* studies in an academic context, from the emergence of the first scholarly works in the late 1960s to the present day. It will also argue that the methodologies and disciplinary contexts that inform *chanson* studies can offer a broader model for Modern Languages research in the twenty-first century, at a time when there is increasing engagement with multidisciplinary and transnational approaches.

Given that the aim here is to trace the development of *chanson* as a field of scholarly enquiry, this essay will concentrate essentially on publications about *chanson* produced in an academic context. Publications about *chanson* in the form of encyclopaedia entries and biographies, or written by journalists or fans, will not be our main focus. This is, among other things, because an overview of these types of publications already exists. Peter Hawkins's 1993 essay 'How do you write about *chanson*?'⁷ and my own work on *chanson* in the 1960s and 1970s,⁸ for example, trace the evolution of writing about *chanson* in non-academic contexts, from the 1950s through to the present. The present essay aims to complement existing work on *chanson* by charting the development of the genre as a subject for academic study. It considers the frameworks through which *chanson* has been read and the methodologies that have informed the critical analysis of the genre.

A key preoccupation of scholars involved in *chanson* studies is the study of the lyrical component. Such scholarship often reads song lyrics as examples of poetry, and thus seeks to

⁷ Peter Hawkins, 'How do you write about *chanson*?', *French Cultural Studies*, 4:10 (1993), 69–79.

⁸ See Haworth, *From the Chanson française to the Canzone d'autore in the 1960s and 1970s*, Chapters 1 and 2 in particular.

identify the literary qualities of the language and, by extension, of *chanson* as a genre. In scholarly terms, such a strategy validates *chanson* as an object of serious academic enquiry and legitimizes the genre as a popular cultural form with high-cultural potential. The first publications of this type to appear include Hongre and Lidsky's contribution to the 'Profil d'une oeuvre' series on Jacques Brel, published in 1976,⁹ and Lucienne Cantaloube-Ferrieu's *Chanson et poésie des années 30 aux années 60* (1981).¹⁰ More recent studies include those by Ian Pickup (a 1997 chapter devoted to the literary criticism of *chanson*),¹¹ and Sara Poole, who has published volumes that analyse the literary qualities of the lyrics of Brassens (2000) and Brel (2004).¹² Joël July's *Esthétique de la chanson française* (2007) and Dimitris Papanikolaou's *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (2007) again privilege the poetic analysis of song lyrics.¹³ This points to what Barbara Lebrun has

⁹ B. Hongre and P. Lidsky, *Jacques Brel: Chansons* (Paris: Hatier, 'Profil d'une oeuvre', 52, 1976).

¹⁰ Lucienne Cantaloube-Ferrieu, *Chanson et poésie des années 30 aux années 60* (Paris: Nizet, 1981).

¹¹ Ian Pickup, 'La Chanson française et la critique littéraire', in Ian Pickup and Philippe Baron (eds), *Aspects de la critique: colloque des universités de Birmingham et de Besançon* (Besançon: Annales littéraires de l'Université de Franche-Comté, 1997), pp. 137–50.

¹² Sara Poole, *Brassens: Chansons* (London: Grant & Cutler, 2000); Sara Poole, *Brel and Chanson: A Critical Appreciation* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004).

¹³ Joël July, *Esthétique de la chanson française* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2007); Dimitris Papanikolaou, *Singing Poets: Literature and Popular Music in France and Greece* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007).

termed ‘the prevalence of a literary tradition’ in the field of French popular music studies,¹⁴ and particularly in work focusing on *chanson*. The lyrics of Brassens have notably constituted the case study for literary-historical studies such as that by Louis Auld (1996), which traces the influence of the medieval period and the troubadours in particular on the singer-songwriter’s *oeuvre*.¹⁵ One by-product of such an approach has been the use of *chanson* as a pedagogical tool for the teaching of the French language. This was discernible in some of the first academic pieces to appear on the genre, in which the study of *chanson* was welcomed as an opportunity to promote student engagement with the linguistic richness of ‘literary’ texts.¹⁶

Linked to the aim of establishing the literariness of *chanson* is that of analysing the linguistic features of specific songs that recur in the body of work of particular songwriters, notably Brassens. Work in this area includes Linda Hantrais’s 1976 two-volume publication *Le Vocabulaire de Georges Brassens*,¹⁷ and, more recently, articles on Brassens’s use of the

¹⁴ Barbara Lebrun, *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), p. 3.

¹⁵ Louis Auld, “‘L’Humble’: Medieval Echoes in the Chansons of Georges Brassens”, *Studies in Medievalism*, 6 (1996), 183–98.

¹⁶ See Naudin, Marie, ‘La Chanson française contemporaine’, *French Review*, 40 (1967), 785–94

¹⁷ Linda Hantrais, *Le Vocabulaire de Georges Brassens*, 2 vols (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976).

passé simple (Delbart, 1996),¹⁸ rhyme (Jeandillou, 2001),¹⁹ and poetic devices associated with the weather (Jacobs, 2013).²⁰ The detailed literary and linguistic analysis of *chanson* is certainly important for the appreciation of the technical qualities and richness of the songwriting in question (Hawkins points this out with particular reference to Brassens²¹). Yet such approaches do not always acknowledge the interaction of the lyric with the music, instrumentation, or performance, or of the song and the songwriter with the relevant socio-cultural, historical and political context. They can thus remain limited in their delineation of the potential broader relevance of *chanson* to other disciplines or fields of experience. A notable exception here is Jeandillou, who reads Brassens's rhyme schemes as scored by his music and diction, and thus analyses the duality of the poetic form in popular song. Jeandillou's study thus constitutes a significant step forwards in developing the 'literary and linguistic critique' approach in *chanson* studies, since it introduces multidisciplinary aspects that draw on musicology and performance studies.

This evolution in approach has continued and has resulted in the publication of works that have begun to embrace a wider range of disciplinary methodologies and frameworks for the analysis of *chanson*. Stéphane Hirschi's research is a useful case in point. While his focus has been primarily on the literariness of *chanson*, on which he has published widely, it has

¹⁸ Anne-Rosine Delbart, "Ainsi que des bossus tous deux nous rigolâmes": le passé simple dans les chansons de Georges Brassens', *Revue de linguistique romane*, 60.239–40 (1996), 485–512.

¹⁹ Jean-François Jeandillou, 'Le Chant des rimes', *Français moderne: revue de linguistique française*, 69.2 (2001), 161–82.

²⁰ Gabriel Jacobs, 'The Elemental Brassens', *Romance Studies*, 17.1 (1999), 15–30.

²¹ Hawkins, *Chanson*, p. 13.

led more specifically to the establishment of *cantologie* as a key critical framework.²²

Although *cantologie* recognizes *chanson* as a literary genre, it also draws on sociology and ultimately argues that *chanson* should be the subject of research in its own right, without necessarily referring to its relationship to poetry or literature. Some of the first conferences on *chanson* to be held in France were the result of this significant theoretical development. Such conferences include ‘La Chanson en lumière’, held from 24–27 April 1996 at the Université de Valenciennes, and ‘Les Frontières improbables de la chanson’, held from 1–4 March 2000 again at Valenciennes. There is also now a *Cantologie* book series, with Hirschi as editor. Established in 2003 and published by Les Belles Lettres and Presses Universitaires de Valenciennes, the series is the first attempt to publish critical readings of *chanson* within

²² A full list of Hirschi’s publications is available at http://www.univ-valenciennes.fr/CALHISTE/membres/hirschi_stephane#publications [accessed 19 July 2017].

For the purposes of this *état présent*, the following publications by Hirschi are of particular note: *Chanson: l’art de fixer l’air du temps – de Béranger à Mano Solo* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres/ PUV, 2008), a monograph which focuses on the writing process; *La Chanson française depuis 1980 – de Goldman à Stromae, entre vinyles et MP3* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres / PUV, 2016), a monograph which looks at various ways in which genre has developed since 1980; ‘Chanson: métaphysique d’un genre’, *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, 601 (2012), np, an article that provides a critical introduction to *chanson*; ‘Esthétique de la chanson depuis 1980: un petit traité’, *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* [online], 0.5 (2012), 181–242 <<http://www.revue-critique-de-fixxion-francaise-contemporaine.org/rcffc/article/view/fx05.18>> [accessed 19 July 2017] an article that critically examines the evolution of *chanson* post 1980.

the French academy and thus constitutes another notable step forward in the development of *chanson* studies.

Although literariness in *chanson* persists as one of the key themes of scholarship, recent research on the genre also seeks to push beyond any simplistic conceptualization of *chanson* as an alternative form of literature and poetry. As scholars have sought to open up our understanding of the contexts within which *chanson* operates, the socio-historical/cultural/political element has been increasingly stressed. Louis-Jean Calvet's *Chanson et société* (1981) was an early landmark here: his volume focussed on the musical and socio-historical context of *chanson*, by examining the ways in which lyrics, performance, voice, music, and staging interact to produce meaning in the context of *chanson*.²³ Jacques Béreaud's 1988 article on *chanson* post-1968 then engaged with the impact of politics and the events of May 1968 in particular on the genre.²⁴ However, it is Peter Hawkins's seminal 2000 monograph on *chanson* which, while approaching *chanson* through an engagement with the literariness of the genre, offers the outstanding example of the turn in *chanson* studies that embraces the contexts within which *chanson* is produced.²⁵ Hawkins blends an analysis of lyrics with a reading of music, performance, star status, and gender in a way that showcases the richness of *chanson* as a source for comment on the popular cultural landscape of

²³ Louis-Jean Calvet, *Chanson et société* (Paris: Payot, 1981).

²⁴ Jacques Béreaud, 'La Chanson française depuis mai 1968', *The French Review*, 62.2 (1988), 229–41.

²⁵ Hawkins, *Chanson*. As the author of the first academic article on *chanson* to be published in English ('How do you write about *chanson*?') Hawkins has also offered scholars an overview of the types of non-academic volumes in existence about *chanson*, tracing further potential avenues for future research.

twentieth-century France. In his subsequent work devoted to Léo Ferré, Hawkins has continued to blend methodologies from the perspective of *chanson* studies, introducing, for example, elements of Bourdieusian analysis, modernism, and postmodernism as a way of reading the singer-songwriter's career and relationship to cultural movements in twentieth-century France.²⁶

Following Hawkins's work, many of the studies that seek to open up our understanding of *chanson* and of the shifting contexts within which it operates have been published post-2000. Indeed, many have been carried out by scholars working in an English-language environment, and who adopt a cultural studies-based approach to French popular music more broadly. David Looseley deserves a special mention here. His is a pioneering voice in *chanson* studies and his work considers the genre from a wider perspective that specifically interrogates the socio-cultural/historical dimension of *chanson*. His 2003 monograph, *Popular Music in Contemporary France: Authenticity, Politics, Debate*, is a fundamental text for anyone studying *chanson*. The volume examines the interactions of *chanson* with other forms of popular music and culture in France from the 1960s to 2000, in a bid to understand the complex value systems and cultural hierarchies at work within the popular music industry in contemporary France. It thus delineates the potential of *chanson* and popular music more broadly to reveal something of the nature of French culture and society.

²⁶ Peter Hawkins, 'Léo Ferré: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Avant-Garde in Popular Chanson', *French Cultural Studies*, 16.2 (2005), 169–78); 'The Career of Léo Ferré: A Bourdieusian Analysis', *Volume*, 2.2, (2003), np <<http://www.cairn.info/revue-volume-2003-2-page-.htm>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

Significant recent work in the field has continued to explore *chanson* and its relationship to French culture, society, history and/or politics. *Chanson's* interactions with other genres of popular music in France was one of the topics considered in the first edited volume on French popular music to be published in English: Hugh Dauncey and Steve Cannon's *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno: Culture, Identity and Society*.²⁷ There have also been works that explore these interactions from a historical perspective: Larry Portis's volume on the social history of popular music in France²⁸ and, more recently, Jonathyne Briggs's cultural history of popular music in France from 1958 to 1980²⁹ both place *chanson* against the historical context of other genres of French popular music post-1945, in order to trace the impact of music on French life and identity. Chris Tinker adopts a more specifically socio-cultural perspective to *chanson* in his 2005 monograph, which examines the links between songwriting and the broader personal and social experiences of Brassens and Brel (and to a lesser extent Ferré).³⁰ As far as *chanson* studies are concerned, Tinker has also published on the relationship between the music industry and Léo Ferré, the industry and Serge Gainsbourg, anti-nationalism and *chanson*, and *chanson* and music

²⁷ Hugh Dauncey and Steve Cannon (eds), *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno: Culture, Identity and Society* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

²⁸ Larry Portis, *French Frenzies: A Social History of Popular Music in France* (College Station, TX: Virtualbookworm.com, 2004).

²⁹ Jonathyne Briggs, *Sounds French: Globalization, Cultural Communities, and Pop Music, 1958–1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

³⁰ Chris Tinker, *Georges Brassens and Jacques Brel: Personal and Social Narratives in Post-War French Chanson* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005)

journalism.³¹ These publications all foreground the way in which *chanson* interacts with French popular culture, literature, and society of the post-1945 period. Such interactions are also the focus of Kim Harrison's unpublished doctoral work on the 'art-commerce' paradox inherent in much of the constitutive discourse of *chanson*,³² and Adeline Cordier's analysis of the Brel-Brassens-Ferré triumvirate as a myth and social signifier of French ideals and identities in the post-war period.³³

In the context of the socio-cultural placement of *chanson* in scholarly work, it is also important to mention Barbara Lebrun's monograph, *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences*:³⁴ although not primarily about *chanson* itself, the volume is an example of the potential expansion of the field of *chanson* studies to achieve a globally more representative and inclusive analysis of French popular music. By focusing on rock and

³¹ Chris Tinker, 'A Singer-Songwriter's View of the French Record Industry: The Case of Leo Ferré', *Popular Music*, 21.2 (2002), 147–57; 'Serge Gainsbourg and le défi américain', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 10.2 (2002), 187–96; 'Anti-Nationalism in Postwar French Chanson', *National Identities*, 4.2 (2002), 133–43; 'The Myth and beyond: Shaping *chanson* in *Les Inrockuptibles* (2007–2011)', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* [online], 0.5 (2012), 89–96 <<http://www.revue-critique-de-fixxion-francaise-contemporaine.org/rcffc/article/view/fx05.08>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

³² Kim Harrison, 'The Self-Conscious *Chanson*: Creative Responses to the Art versus Commerce Debate' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Leeds, 2005).

³³ Adeline Cordier, *Post-War French Popular Music: Cultural Identity and the Brel-Brassens-Ferré Myth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014).

³⁴ Barbara Lebrun, *Protest Music in France: Production, Identity and Audiences* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

protest music, Lebrun challenges the cultural hierarchy that is often discernible within *chanson* discourse, which legitimates the study of *chanson* as an art form, encourages the permanence of a literary approach in its analysis, and requires other forms such as *variétés* or *rock* to be stigmatized or downgraded due to their perceived commercialism. Her study demonstrates in particular the complex cultural value systems and discourses which pervade French society and which popular music, including *chanson*, is able to reveal and explicate. Lebrun has subsequently developed this element of *chanson* studies further in her work on twenty-first century *chanson*.³⁵

Another important volume that seeks to further open up our understanding of and approach to the study of *chanson* is the collective volume *Stereo: Comparative Perspectives on the Sociological Study of Popular Music in France and Britain* (2011).³⁶ This publication brings together essays from leading scholars in popular music studies from Britain and France, and it tellingly illuminates the different ways in which scholars from the two countries analyse the phenomenon. Although *chanson* does not feature as a central preoccupation, the presentation of critical frameworks through which to analyse French popular music from a specifically French perspective helps to open up further the field of *chanson* studies to new and innovative approaches. In the Introduction to the collection, Dauncey and Le Guern observe:

³⁵ Barbara Lebrun, 'Beyond Brassens: Twenty-First Century Chanson and the New Generation of Singer-Songwriters', *Modern and Contemporary France*, 22.2 (2014), 159–75.

³⁶ Hugh Dauncey and Philippe Le Guern (eds), *Stereo: Comparative Perspectives on the Sociological Study of Popular Music in France and Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).

French research on popular culture in general and popular music in particular has often suffered from a kind of double disqualification both by an academic and intellectual system which has traditionally favoured ‘élite’ cultural forms and practices, and by the perceived backwardness and simplicity of French conceptualizations and research methods compared with those [...] of British and American specialists.³⁷

The volume as a whole provides key insights into the differences of approach to *chanson* studies in Britain and France, from the point of view of development, methodology, and even subject matter. The French contributors write about popular music in general, and not on *chanson* specifically, for their research interests lie broadly within the areas of sociology, cultural studies, musicology, and cultural policy. Significantly, the fact that *chanson* does not feature as a genre in its own right illustrates that, as far as research into French popular music in France is concerned, *chanson* is not as privileged a genre as might be expected. Indeed, the establishment of the journal *Volume! La revue des musiques populaires* in 2002 demonstrates that *chanson* features alongside articles (for example) about the Beatles, metal music, and the alternative music press, illustrating the multidisciplinary approach to research in popular music in France that has come to characterize the field in recent years.

Yet the French and the French language context have also seen an opening up of methodological approaches to the study of *chanson* itself, specifically in the post-2000 period. While it is clear that the literary tradition, which privileges and encourages the analysis of *chanson* as a poetic form, is still influential, Lebrun has pointed out that, since 2000, ‘a number of French sociologists have started to focus on popular music from a

³⁷ Ibid., p. 3.

combined perspective, privileging for instance cultural policy, the practices of musicians, or those of audiences'.³⁸ Although *chanson* itself has not tended to be the primary area of concern of this body of work, there are notable examples of scholars whose work on *chanson* specifically has benefitted from the broader study of popular music in France from an academic perspective. Cécile Prévost-Thomas, for example, is the author of a range of articles that explore *chanson* from the point of view of gender and sociology.³⁹ Joël July has published on the place of contemporary *chanson* alongside other musical genres like *variétés*, rock, and rap,⁴⁰ and his 2016 edited volume *Chanson: du collectif à l'intime* brings together a series of essays that examine the listener's perception of *chanson* through an analysis of lyrics, music, and voice.⁴¹ Olivier Bourderionnet's monograph *Swing Troubadours: Brassens, Vian, Gainsbourg. Les Trente Glorieuses en 33 tours* analyses the relationship of

³⁸ Lebrun, *Protest Music in France*, p. 3. Lebrun quotes Le Guern's chapter in Dauncey and Cannon, *Popular Music in France from Chanson to Techno*, in which a survey of this work is provided.

³⁹ Her publications relevant to this *état présent* include 'Les Temporalités de la chanson francophone contemporaine', *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 113 (2002), 331–46 <doi: 10.3917/cis.113.0331> [accessed 19 July 2017] and 'Note de synthèse bibliographique: les nouvelles perspectives en sociologie de la musique', *L'Année sociologique*, 60 (2010), 403–17 <doi: 10.3917/anso.102.0403> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁴⁰ Joël July, 'Chanson française contemporaine: état des lieux communs', *Revue critique de fixxion française contemporaine* [online], 0.5 (2012), 7–31 <<http://www.revue-critique-de-fixxion-francaise-contemporaine.org/rcffc/article/view/fx05.02>> [accessed 19 July 2017].

⁴¹ Joël July (ed.), *Chanson: du collectif à l'intime* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires de Provence, 2016).

chanson to jazz and thus seeks to reconfigure the canon of French popular singer-songwriters.⁴²

Stéphane Chaudier and Perle Abbrugiati are also active in the area of *chanson* studies and have staged key research events on *chanson*. In this context, Abbrugiati's particular contribution to the field ought to be underlined. She has organized a series of colloquia and study days, including the 'Chanson. Les ondes du monde' workshop that took place on 1–2 June 2015 at the Université d'Aix–Marseille.⁴³ This international event brought together colleagues from across France, as well as specialists in popular music and *chanson* from Italy, the UK, and Austria; its aim was 'la création d'un réseau interdisciplinaire et international de recherche pour une étude croisée de la chanson, comprise comme un objet polymorphe (elle réunit texte, musique, art scénique, elle est un objet de culture populaire, passant de pays à pays)'.⁴⁴ A network was subsequently set up at Aix–Marseille to study *chanson française* in its broadest context (including its presence and representation in other countries outside of France). The interdisciplinary character of this initiative demonstrates the expansion that *chanson* studies in France have enjoyed in recent years. As the workshop

⁴² Olivier Bourderionnet, *Swing Troubadours: Brassens, Vian, Gainsbourg. Les Trente Glorieuses en 33 tours* (Birmingham, AL: Summa Publications, 2011).

⁴³ The workshop programme can be accessed at: < <http://caer.univ-amu.fr/2015/05/25/workshop-chanson-les-ondes-du-monde-2/>> [accessed 23 July 2017].

⁴⁴ Joël July, 'Bilan du Workshop Pluridisciplinaire: "Chanson. Les ondes du monde"', email to the author, 8 July 2015.

materials explain, this is ‘un champ de recherche qui peut être exploité pendant de nombreuses années’, with the potential for further international collaborations and projects.⁴⁵

The potential of *chanson* as a research case-study to straddle disciplinary and methodological boundaries is one of the strengths of the field that has become even more apparent in recent years. Looseley’s 2015 monograph on Édith Piaf is a case in point. While this study clearly builds on Looseley’s previous work on *chanson*, he explicitly seeks to provide a cultural history of the singer that also engages with star studies and gender studies, by way of ‘critically analysing [her] legend: its origins, evolution, contradictions and cultural significance’,⁴⁶ taking into consideration her international standing, and reading her as a *lieu de mémoire* that functions as ‘a vector of national cultural memory’⁴⁷ in France. Although the volume is aimed at a non-academic audience, it is nevertheless essential reading for scholars given its significant contribution in the areas of star studies, cultural history, French studies, and memory studies in general.

This coming together of disciplines and methodologies also demonstrates the ways in which *chanson* studies are able to contribute to scholarly debates beyond French studies. Such methodological hybridity characterizes Barbara Lebrun’s 2013 edited volume on *chanson* and performance, which explores the physicality of *chanson* through an analysis of the body and voice of its proponents. This analysis brings *chanson* studies into contact with,

⁴⁵ Joël July, ‘Bilan du Workshop Pluridisciplinaire: “Chanson. Les ondes du monde”’, email to the author, July 8 2015.

⁴⁶ David Looseley, *Édith Piaf: A Cultural History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 21

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 129

among others, theories of stardom, performance, performativity, gender, and identity.⁴⁸ My own work on *chanson* examines its relationship to the Italian singer-songwriter genre, the *canzone d'autore*, and interrogates notions of influence and cultural translation.⁴⁹ Such publications illustrate the ways in which *chanson* studies also interact with a wide range of disciplines, including: star studies, gender studies, performance studies, intermediality, transnationality, and cultural translation.

It is this potential for multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary that will influence the shape and nature of *chanson* studies in the future. This essay has stressed the contribution that research on *chanson* makes to broader debates in the French context regarding cultural discourse, notions of cultural hierarchy, and the problematic nature of popular cultural forms. In particular, the research considered here illustrates more broadly the way in which work on *chanson* sheds light on the 'Frenchness' of the form, speaking to our understanding of French identity and contributing to the ongoing debate regarding what it indeed means to 'be French'. For the future, however, research on *chanson* appears to be further expanding these questions and the debates that they generate. Multidisciplinary has emerged as a strength of *chanson* studies. Indeed, research in *chanson* both prefigured and also mirrored the increased interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary that Arts and Humanities research witnessed more generally in the late 1990s and during the 2000s. In the context of French studies today, *chanson* is thus a key field for further developments in these areas.

But is this where the future lies? Can *chanson* also embrace the turn towards the transnational and the transcultural that is beginning to mark languages research? It is

⁴⁸ Barbara Lebrun (ed.), *Chanson et performance: mise en scène du corps dans la chanson française et francophone* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2013).

⁴⁹ Haworth, *From the Chanson française to the Canzone d'autore in the 1960s and 1970s*.

certainly the case that the diversity of methodologies and disciplinary contexts that has informed *chanson* studies thus far brings a degree of flexibility and an awareness of the need to situate *chanson* within wider contexts. Current research in *chanson* is doing precisely this. As well as developing further the multidisciplinary nature of *chanson* studies, and thereby widening the boundaries of the field, future research will need to engage with *chanson*'s presence and cultural impact around the globe, positioning *chanson* studies firmly within an exciting transnational context.